This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Rev. EBENEZER HILL

MEMOIR, SERMONS AND LECTURES

Digitized by Google

71-79-2

US 11978.5

The Gift of
Hon. John Boynton Hill,
of
Bangor, Maine,
(Class of 1821)
22d Feb. 1859.

Digitized by Google

Presented to the Library of
Harvard College by the
Author.
D. B. Hill

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Engd. By Cromwell & Kimmel

Your affectionate Father

Eben'r Hill

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. EBENEZER HILL,

PASTOR OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

IN

MASON, N. H.

FROM NOVEMBER, 1790, TO MAY, 1854.

WITH SOME OF HIS SERMONS,

AND HIS DISCOURSE ON THE

HISTORY OF THE TOWN.

BY

JOHN B. HILL.

BOSTON:
LUCIUS A. ELLIOT & CO.
D. BUGBEE & CO., BANGOR.
1858.

Digitized by Google

~~17354,64~~

US 11978.5

1859 Lb22
Gift of
Gov. John Boynton Kelly
of Georgia
Class of 1824

PRINTED BY SAMUEL S. SMITH,

BANGOR, ME.

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

To write the biography of a parent, is a delicate task. It has not been undertaken in the present instance, without a full appreciation of the difficulties in its accomplishment. Neither the feelings of the writer, nor the proprieties of the occasion, would permit any other tone than that of eulogy. My endeavor has been in this sketch, to exhibit fairly, the prominent traits of the character and incidents of the life of my father, especially in their effects upon the church and people of his charge; and in doing so, I am not conscious that I have stepped beyond the line of propriety, either in the exhibition of commendable traits, or in the concealment or suppression of faults or imperfections. For the main body of this sketch, I am indebted to my brother, the Rev. T. Hill, of Saint Louis, Mo.

The discourse upon leaving the Old Meeting House, is printed from a manuscript transcribed from the original, soon after it was delivered. The other discourses, are reprints of the first edition, with no change, but the correction of manifest errors. The portrait accompanying this volume, is engraved from a painting made at the age of about seventy years. The engraved page of a sermon, is a fac simile of the sermon preached at the dedication of the meeting house, in 1795.

J. B. Hill.

Bangor, May 1, 1858.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MEMOIR.

"Every man's life is of importance to himself, to his family, to his friends, to his country, and in the sight of God. They are by no means the best men, who have made most noise in the world; neither are those actions most deserving of praise, which have obtained the greatest show of fame. Scenes of violence and blood, the workings of ambition, pride and revenge, compose the annals of men. But piety and purity, temperance and humility, which are little noted and soon forgotten of the world, are held in everlasting remembrance before God." *Hunter's Sacred Biography, vol.* 1, *p.* 24.

No two men have ever existed, whose lives were, in all respects, exact counterparts of each other. Every human being, is thoroughly individualized by his own will, and has a history that is peculiar to himself, which can never be so blended with that of another, as not to possess points of interest, in contrast, to attentive observers. No two persons can be found, whose physical endowments are not such as to render them distinguishable by their intimate friends. So also, a marked distinction will be found in the mental powers, the modes of thought, and manner of action of individuals most closely resembling each other. Each, in all these respects, will have traits in a good degree original and peculiar to himself. Hence, the faithful portraiture of the character of any individual will afford instruction to others. They will recognize in it, situations similar to their own, and by observing how difficulties have been overcome, and trials borne, or how temptations have led to ruin, they may be encouraged to struggle for victory, and shun the path which led another to destruction.

Digitized by Google

If it be true, that every man is so individualized as to render his real life instructive to others, it is peculiarly so, with the life of a christian; for with him a new element of power is introduced, and grace controls and silently renovates the man, evolving its own light from the darkness of nature, and so moulding the original elements, that upon all is enstamped the glorious image of Jesus, and the man is formed anew, and fitted for heaven.

Could the real life of any christian be written, it would form a most interesting volume, and it would matter little, what position in life the subject of it might have occupied. The life of Moses is rich and varied, but the simple sketch of Lazarus, sitting at the rich man's gate,—dying alone, and borne by angels to Abraham's bosom, has a touching beauty, equalling in interest anything found in that of the law-giver.

If these views are correct, the life of any earnest, successful preacher of the gospel, must have an intrinsic interest in whatever station his lot has been cast. He may not have been as eloquent as Whitfield, as deep a theologian as Edwards, nor have possessed the finished grandeur of Robert Hall; but he has fought a good fight himself, has pointed many sinners to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world; and trained many souls for immortality, and fitted them for heaven. The memory of such a man is enshrined in the best affections of many who have felt always his influence, and a view of his life will furnish them, and others also, with new motives for leading a life of faith.

Such was the humble, earnest life of him, of whose history and character, it is proposed here to give a brief outline. His was the quiet life of a retired pastor of a country church; of one, whose highest ambition it was, to be a faithful preacher of the gospel, to those whom God had placed under his care. It is the object of this sketch, to enable those who read it, to form a distinct idea of his individual character, of his manner of life, and of the general results of his labors; and the many friends who revered and loved him

Digitized by Google

while living, to preserve a fresh and vivid memory of their departed pastor, counselor and friend.

Ebenezer Hill, the subject of this memoir, was born in Cambridge, Mass., January 31st, 1766. He was the youngest son of Samuel Hill and Sarah Cutler, his wife. His father was born in Boston, but of his parentage and ancestry, nothing is certainly known. He was a carpenter by trade, but never rose above the condition of the most humble poverty. He served as a common soldier, in the war of the revolution, and returned to Cambridge at its close, to resume his occupation as a carpenter. After his son Samuel settled in Mason, he came to that place, and resided there with him, most of the time, till the close of his life. He died at Mason, June 21st, 1798, aged about sixty-six years. His mother, Sarah Cutler, was born in the year 1733, in what was, April 24th, 1746, incorporated as the second precinct of Concord, and afterwards on the 19th of April, 1754, incorporated as a town by the name of Lincoln. Her father, Ebenezer Cutler, was one of the petitioners for the incorporation of the precinct. She was a woman of great energy. With very scanty means, and, in a great measure, with the labor of her own hands, she provided for the support, training and education of her children. In October, 1781, she purchased a lot of land in Cambridge, thirty feet square, for the price of "nine pounds, twelve shillings, lawful money of this Commonwealth." It is described in the deed, as lying "on the north side of the house of Moses and William Boardman, deceased; on the road leading to Lexington." It was about one mile northerly of the colleges. Upon this plot, she placed a small cottage house, in which she and her family resided. The building was a portion of barracks occupied by the Revolutionary army, when stationed at Cambridge. The land was appraised by three disinterested persons, in June, 1796, at one hundred and thirty-five dollars. It undoubtedly comprised, at that time, the principal part of the family estate. About the year 1790, she went to Mason, and resided there

Digitized by Google

with her son Ebenezer, until the close of her life. She died December 30th, 1808, aged seventy-five years.

Two sons, Samuel and Ebenezer, were their only children. Samuel, the eldest, was born in 1764. He was a carpenter by trade, and followed that occupation through life. It seems that the brothers at an early period, formed the resolution to fix their residence in the same town. Samuel writes to Ebenezer from Goshen, Vermont, under date of November 24th, 1787, as follows: "If things will permit, as you wrote to me about our living in one town, I hope, that by the blessing of God, we shall; but when, I know not, but must wait God's own due time." This purpose, so early formed, was accomplished. Samuel came to reside in Mason, probably, in the year 1792. He was certainly resident there early in 1793, and there he passed the remainder of his life, a useful, industrious man, noted for sterling integrity and independence of character; a good husband, father, and citizen. He died May 23d, 1813, aged forty-nine years. His first wife was Dorcas Wyeth, born in Cambridge. She died at Mason, January 19th, 1807, at the age of thirty-seven years.

His second wife, was Mary Adams, daughter of John and Mary Adams, born in Mason, August 11th, 1780. They were married in September, 1809. This wife survived him, and is still (January, 1858) living in widowhood, at Mason.

Ebenezer, the second son of Samuel and Sarah, was the favorite son of his mother. By the devotion, on her part, of all her means to that end, he was prepared at the age of sixteen years, to enter Harvard college. His preparatory studies were pursued at the grammar school in Cambridge, under the tuition among other teachers, of the late Rev. Dr. Bancroft, of Worcester, and Rev. Dr. Kendall, of Newton. Students were then admitted to the college, upon a personal examination into their literary qualifications, made by the officers of the college; and if found by them to be sufficiently grounded in the requisite preparatory studies, and to furnish the proper testimonials of moral character, their names were

Digitized by Google

entered upon the books of the steward as students, on their producing the bond, and making the payments required by the college laws. A printed extract from these laws, was delivered to the student, whose examination had been found to be satisfactory, pointing out what further was required to be done on his part, before he could become a member of the college. This document, as well as the bond he gave, was found carefully preserved, among his papers. It is thought that as a matter of curiosity, and as illustrating the manners of the times, most readers of this book, will feel interest enough in the subject, at least to excuse its insertion. It is as follows:

"Extract from the second and third laws of Chapt. 1st, of the College Laws.

CHAP. I. PART OF LAW 2D.

"The Parents or Guardians of those who have been approved on Examination, or some other person, shall pay three pounds to the Steward, towards defraying their College Charges; also, give bond to the Steward, with one or more Sureties to his Satisfaction, in the sum of two hundred ounces of silver, to pay College Dues Quarterly, as they are charged in the Quarter Bills, Viz: the Stewards, Glaziers and Sweepers. And in case of Death or Removal before College Charges arise, to the sum of three pounds, the Steward shall return the remainder to the person who gave the bond."

In the original paper the sums expressed were "thirty shillings," which was erased, and "three pounds" inserted; and "Forty pounds" erased, and "two hundred ounces of silver" inserted; and "thirty shillings" erased, and "three pounds" inserted.

"Part of Law 3d. Every one that has been accepted, shall, as soon as may be, exhibit to the President, a Certificate of the Steward, that the foregoing rules have been complied with. Upon the receipt of which, the President shall sign an

Digitized by Google

Order for the Admission of such Person, in the following words:

"Cantabrigiæ Augusti.

"Addmittatur in Collegium Harvardinum. A. B.
Præses.

And the Order shall be kept on File by the Steward. And no one shall be allowed to take Possession of any chamber in the College, or receive the Instructions of that Society, or be considered a member thereof, until he has been admitted according to the form prescribed."

This paper is dated July 19th, 1782. At the foot, is a memorandum in the hand-writing of Joseph Willard, the president, and signed by him as follows:

"The above alterations were made in conformity to a late order of the Government of the College.

J. WILLARD, Presdt."

Upon the first page of the same sheet, is the admittatur in the words following:

"FORM OF ADMISSION.

"Cantabrigiæ Julii 13° 1782. Admittatur in Collegium Harvardinum *Ebenezer Hill.*

JOSEPHUS WILLARD, Præses."

The bond required, was signed by his mother's brothers, Elisha Cutler of Waltham, yeoman, and Jonas Cutler of Groton, shop-keeper, and is dated August 13th, 1782.

He thus become a member of this venerable and useful institution, and supported by the exertions of his mother, and his expenses borne, in part, by the aid furnished by funds liberally and thoughtfully contributed by benevolent persons, to enable students in want of pecuniary means to pursue their studies, he completed his college course with commendable diligence, and a fair exhibition of scholarly attainments, but without displaying any striking traits of character, or meeting with any note-worthy incidents; a sample of that class of

Digitized by Google

industrious and persevering conservative students and professional men, who have contributed in no small degree, to make the character of the New England people and their institutions, what it has been, and, it is hoped, will continue to be, for all coming time.

Of his student life, few memorials remain; but these are enough to prove it to have been both pleasant and profitable. He always spoke of, it as if the associations connected with it were agreeable, and there remain indications of his progress, which shew that it must have been with him a time of industry, and of creditable success. His knowledge of the Latin language, was quite accurate, and he retained his fondness for that noble speech until his old age.

While in college, he acquired a habit of exactness which remained with him through life. His penmanship, which was always singularly uniform, close and beautiful, was early acquired. A blot or illegible word, or word misspelt, will hardly be found in all his manuscripts, which are very numerous, embracing a period of more than seventy years. There is no difficulty, in recognizing the same beautiful hand through the entire period. A sample of his hand-writing, being a fac simile of a page of one of his sermons, will be found among the illustrations of this work.

There is now, in the possession of the writer, a manuscript book of one hundred and thirty foolscap pages, containing a system of mathematics, as taught while he was a member of the college, being, in fact, the exercises required to be wrought out by the student, in that branch of study; embracing arithmetic, algebra, geometry, surveying, drawing, &c., all written and executed with the most singular neatness and care. The diagrams are drawn with great beauty and accuracy, and some of them are carefully and tastefully colored. There is, also, in the same possession, a letter written on his eightieth birth-day, which, when compared with the manuscript book, shews the same hand almost unchanged. Nor did it ever change, until his powers so

Digitized by Google

failed that his trembling hand no longer obeyed his will, and the feeble lines traced by it, too plainly showed the decay of old age.

He graduated at the commencement, in 1786. Among his class-mates were the Hon. Timothy Bigelow, many years speaker of the house of representatives, of Massachusetts; Rev. Alden Bradford, secretary of the commonwealth, and author of a valuable history of the state; Rev. Dr. Wm. Harris, president of Columbia College; Hon. John Lowell, distinguished as a jurist, a politician, a controversial writer and an agriculturalist; Hon. Isaac Parker, chief justice of the supreme judicial court of Massachusetts; and Thomas W. Thompson, and Christopher Grant Champlin, members of the house of representatives and of the senate of the United States. Of his intimate friends in the class, the Rev. Jacob Norton, formerly of Weymouth, survived him. He died at Billerica, where the last years of his life were spent, January 17th, 1858, at the age of ninety-three years, eleven months, five days, being, at the time of his death, the oldest surviving graduate of Harvard College.

There is a fact worthy of a moment's notice, as an indication of the comparative longevity of the New England clergy. In his class, the number of graduates was forty-five. Ten of these were clergymen. When the triennial catalogue of 1839 was published, but fifteen of this class were living, and of that number, seven were clergymen. As another indication of the same fact, it is worthy of note, that on the first day of May, 1854, there were residing in the state of New Hampshire, within a distance not exceeding in all fifteen miles of each other, three congregational clergymen, whose united ages would make two hundred and seventy-eight years; Rev. Laban Ainsworth of Jaffrey, at the age of ninety-seven, Rev. Gad Newell, of Nelson, at the age of ninety-three, Rev. Ebenezer Hill, of Mason, at the age of eighty-eight years; all of them enjoying a comfortable measure of health, and all of them residing in the town and society in which they

Digitized by Google

were originally settled in the ministry; Mr. Ainsworth having passed his one hundredth, and Mr. Newell his ninety-sixth year, still (January, 1858) survive. Another remarkable instance of the longevity of the clergymen of that time and region, is presented in the fact, that in February, 1858, there were living, four graduates of Dartmouth college, whose united ages exceeded four hundred years; viz: the Rev. John Sawyer, D. D., of Bangor, Maine, one hundred and two years and four months, the Rev. Laban Ainsworth, of Jaffrey, N. H., one hundred years, seven months, the Rev. Ethan Osborn, of Fairton, N. J., ninety-nine years, five months, and the Rev. Zachariah Greene, of Hampstead, L. I., ninety-nine years, one month; all undoubtedly natives of New England.

Soon after graduating, in the autumn of 1786, he commenced school-teaching in Westford. He remained there, and in that employment, about two years. Here he formed the acquaintance with his first wife, Mary Boynton, daughter of Nathaniel Boynton, and Rebecca (Barrett) his wife. While residing at Westford, he seems to have finally determined on, and made choice of the gospel ministry, as his profession and business in life. In a letter from his friend and classmate, Tapley Wyeth, dated June 9th, 1787, occurs this sentence. "I am glad to hear you are determined on the study of divinity; the prospects are bright, when compared with those of the other learned professions." This, to be sure, was a very mundane view of the subject, but it was one perfectly in accordance with the notions on this question, by many entertained at that period. With the subject of this memoir, there is reason to believe, that the considerations finally inducing him to the adoption of this line of life, were of a much more grave, serious and appropriate character. The citation is made, rather to show that at this early period he had made known to his friend, his determination to adopt the clerical profession, rather than to indicate his ultimate inducements to that choice.

It was, in those days, customary for young men soon after,

Digitized by Google

if not before, graduating, to make choice of a professional life according to their several tastes. It was not then, as now, among the clergy calling themselves orthodox, deemed an essential qualification, before commencing the study of theology, that the student should possess and profess personal piety, and manifest it by uniting with some church; but the embryo preacher chose his profession, undoubtedly in most instances, with serious reflection and consideration; and acquired his piety and religious experience, not before, but after he commenced his theological studies. Whether Mr. Hill's thoughts were turned in this direction, before, or soon after graduating, is not now known, but it is understood that he had in his own mind, made choice of this walk in life, before he was the subject of any personal religious impressions. While engaged in his duties as a teacher at Westford, the thought occurred to him, when contemplating his purpose of a clerical life, how inconsistent it would be for him to undertake to teach others the way of life, and become their spiritual guide, when he was himself ignorant of "the way, the truth and the life." This reflection fastened itself upon his mind, and led to deep, serious, and anxious enquiry, resulting in religious conversion, and the full and sincere dedication of his life and all its energies, to the work of the ministry. This incident of his religious life and experience, a subject to which he was, in his intercourse with his most intimate friends, singularly sparing in any allusion, is preserved alone in the memory of Mrs. Dunster, who in a venerable old age, with a remarkable preservation of mental vigor, remains in the year 1858, the sole surviving member of the church as constituted at the time of his ordination as its pastor. The authority for this statement, is the funeral sermon, preached at Mason village, after the death of Mr Hill, by the Rev. Mr. Kellogg.

A singular incident connected with his school-teaching at Westford, was brought to light a few years before his death. As it exhibits a remarkable instance of firmness, decision of character, energy and perseverance in a yankee boy, conduct-

Digitized by Google

ing him to the most honorable and useful stations in life, it is hoped that the use made of the correspondence, as an illustration of the manners of the times and the characters of the actors, by its introduction here for that purpose, will be pardoned. In January, 1848, Mr. Hill received by mail the following letter:

M———, Vermont, Jan'y 4, 1848.

REV. EBENEZER HILL,

My Dear Sir:—I noticed, not long since, your name as a clergyman in Mason, in a New Hampshire register. My object in writing to you is, to ascertain if you are the person, that taught a district school in Westford, about the winter of 1788. Will you be so kind as to inform me by mail, and if I find that you are the same person, I will then, inform you of my object, in asking for this information.

Yours, with great respect, J—— R——.

To this letter, Mr. Hill replied as follows:

MASON, JAN'Y 10, 1848.

MR. J—— R——:

SIR:—I received a line from you, requesting information, whether I am the person who taught a district school in Westford, in the winter of 1788.

In answer to your question, I say, I graduated at Cambridge, in the year 1786, and in the autumn of the year, took the town school in Westford, for a year. This school, I kept two years, removing from one district to another. Whether the turn came to the Forge, or Stony Brook district in the winter of 1788, I do not recollect. But of this I am sure, that there was no school kept in the town, in those two years, other than was taught by me, and, for a season, after quitting the schools, I remained in Westford, and made that town my home, so that I feel confident, that no school-master of the name of Hill, taught a school in Westford, but myself.

I shall, sir, with some degree of excited curiosity be waiting, for the promised information, respecting the enquiry.

Respectfully yours, EBEN'R HILL.

Digitized by Google

To this the following reply was received:

M———, Vt., Jan'y 18, 1848.

Rev. Ebenezer Hill:

Dear Sir:—Yours of the 10th instant is received, in which you say, you taught school in Westford two years, commencing in the autumn of 1786. I am satisfied, that you are the person I have been anxious to find, for the last half century or more. I am the son of J—— R——, living in the east part of the town. I attended your school in the winter of 1787, and in the fall of the same year, when you kept in the middle of the town, also, the winter school of 1788, you kept in the district where my father resided. Col's Wright and Osgood lived in the same district. I think you boarded with Capt. Peletiah, or Capt. Thomas Fletcher, both winters. All passed pleasantly, till the last week in February, when for some trifling fault, in (say whispering,) being then only eleven years of age, you called me up, and ordered me to stand out in the middle of the floor, about an hour before the school closed in the afternoon, and let me stand there without my reading or spelling, until the school closed for the day, and without your saying a word to me; which I considered a great insult. I therefore remained, until you and the scholars had retired, except a young man (Levi Wright) who was to take care of the house. I then thought of revenge, &c., and collected your books, inkstand and ruler, with intent to burn them up; but before I could effect the object, Levi Wright discovered what I was doing, and interfered, and saved all except the inkstand, ruler, and a small book or two, say to the value from three to six shillings worth. Wright told me I should be whipped to death the next day, which brought me to my senses. I then resolved to leave the country. I had an uncle visiting at my father's, who lived at Plymouth, N. H. I resolved to go home with him, to get clear of punishment, and finally persuaded my father to let me go, though he would not if he had known the reason, and I was off in a day or two; so I escaped the

Digitized by Google

punishment I so richly deserved, without my parents knowing my crime, and I never returned [to reside in the town.] I have ever regretted my fault and error, and have intended, if ever I could see you, or learn your place of residence, to make an apology and satisfaction, though, perhaps, you have long since forgotten the transaction. I now sir, enclose to you $5,00, to pay debt and interest, which I hope you will receive with the same kind feelings, which I have in sending it to you; and wish you to consider my extreme youth when the error was committed. Perhaps you may have some curiosity to know my success in life, &c. I resided in Plymouth until May, 1803, when I came into this state and engaged in trade, and followed trade successfully about thirty years. In public life, I have been eight years a representative to the legislature, a justice of the peace thirty years, a judge of our courts some years, also, judge of probate in this county, one of the electors of president and vice president of the United States, (Harrison) one of the council of censors to revise the constitution of this state, county treasurer the last twenty years, and many minor offices. I now live in retirement, being seventy-one years of age. *Respectfully yours, with my best wishes for your health and happiness.*

J—— R——.

P. S. Will you be so good as to acknowledge the receipt of this, and oblige J. R.

The substance of Mr. Hill's letter in reply, is as follows:

Hon. J—— R——.

Dear Sir:—Yours of the 18th instant, came safe to hand, and you may be assured it has been read repeatedly, with deeply interested feelings. I thank you for the favor. It has led to some reflections on the ways of Divine Providence in bringing about events very important, yet unlooked for, and unexpected. Who would have thought that the wild freaks of a boy eleven years old, in attempting to escape punishment for a pardonable fault in school, would lead him

Digitized by Google

to forsake his father's house, and all the endearments of home and family connections, and youthful acquaintances? that such an event, should be the first step to bring that youth to fill places of honor and trust to which few aspire, and to which very few attain? And yet, had one link been wanting in the chain of events which placed J—— R——, the little lad, with his distant relatives in Plymouth, he would not be, as at this day, the Hon. J—— R——, in Vermont, having filled most of the various offices of high and honorary trust. With respect to the "debt and interest" of which you write, I had no debt, and the circumstances named, were entirely forgotten. If debt was due to either, it was rather to you, than to me. However, I receive the sum gratefully, as a token of your kind remembrance and continued friendship. I rejoice in the blessings which God has bestowed upon you, and hope still to enjoy your kind remembrance while I remain on earth. Judging from the pleasure I have received in the sketches of your life, I am led to presume that it will not be entirely uninteresting to you, to learn some of the events of my life since the time to which your letter refers.

After leaving the school, I made Westford my principal home, until I went to read with Dr. Payson of Rindge. In the year 1790, I was ordained pastor of the congregational church in Mason, and that relation has continued to the present day. I have had two colleague pastors settled with me, but now am alone in that office. I have been blessed with an unusual degree of health, having in all my ministry, but very few times been taken off from public ministerial labors, for want of health, and through the abounding mercy of God, have been spared to see the last day of January, 1848, which completed my eighty-second year of pilgrimage on earth. But four or five are now living in the town, who were at the head of a family, when I became their minister." The letter closes with some particular details of his family, which will be more pertinently introduced in another connection.

Digitized by Google

To resume the narrative. After closing his school-teaching at Westford, he pursued the study of theology with the Rev. Seth Payson, (afterwards known as Dr. Payson,) of Rindge, N. H. While residing at Rindge, and in his family, he united with the church in Rindge, by profession, September 28th, 1788.

At that time, there were no theological seminaries in the land. The usual course was, for the candidate for the ministry, to resort to some well known divine, who had a reputation for learning and ability to teach, and with him to pursue such a course of study, as the parties should think proper. After the course of instruction was sufficiently advanced, the pastor would introduce his pupil to his own pulpit and people, before he went abroad; and thus give him the benefit of a certain degree of experience, under the most favorable circumstances. This form of instruction, if it did not furnish to the student so good an opportunity for extensive and accurate scholarship, as the present mode, yet possessed advantages for carefully observing the operations of divine truth on a christian parish, and thereby preparing himself for the discharge of his professional duties, with fewer embarrassments than are usually in the way of a cloister student, who has passed through a full curriculum of collegiate and theological education.

The reasons inducing him to apply to Dr. Payson for instruction, are not now known, but he seems to have been favored by a divine providence, in the selection of his teacher. Dr. Payson was a man of sterling worth, and he secured the regard of his pupil, and retained it till his death.

If, as stated in his letter to Mr. R——, he spent two years as a school-teacher in Westford, he must have commenced his residence with Mr. Payson in August, 1788. That it was so, his letters show; for in one bearing date at Rindge, August, 1788, (the day of the month not inserted,) he writes, "I have now been here eleven days." His novitiate was very short, for his license to preach, bears date October 28th,

Digitized by Google

1788. He commenced preaching as a candidate, immediately after. Many of his sermons remaining, bear date in that year. Indeed, it is probable, that his first effort in conducting the public worship in the pulpit, was prior to that date, for in a letter dated, as usual with him at that time, by the day of the week, omitting that of the month, under date of Saturday evening, October, 1788, he writes, "Mr. Payson has just been into my study, and says I must preach for him to-morrow, for he is not prepared." The letter continued on subsequent days, till Saturday, two weeks from the first date, makes no mention of the examination or license.

The following copy of this venerable document is worthy of insertion, for its quaintness, and also, as a sample of the mode in which such important matters were disposed of, by the fathers of the New England churches:

At an/ Association/ in/ Ashburnham/ Oct. 28, 1788, Eben'r Hill, A. B. appeared and submitted himself to examination as a Candidate/ for ye/ Gospel ministry :---Upon/ enquiry into his moral Character, ministerial furniture/ and views in/ undertaking ye/ work, voted unanimously satisfied with Him/ in/ sd Character, and He/ is heartily recommended to preach whereever God in/ his Providence/ shall give/ him/ opportunity: and we wish He/ may prove a rich Blessing to the Chh and Pple of God, and that He may be an able and Faithful minister of the new testament.

By Order of ye association/

John/ Cushing, scribe.

There cannot be much doubt, that while teaching school during the two years in Westford, he was under the direction of Dr. Payson, pursuing his theological studies, and that the date above stated, is that of the commencement of his resi-

Digitized by Google

dence in the family of his instructor, rather than that of the commencement of his professional studies.

Among other places, he exercised his ministry in the town of Marlborough, so much to the acceptance of the church and people, that they gave him a call to settle in that place, as their minister. This call was voted in concurrence with the church, at a town meeting, held November 13th, 1789. The provision for his support, offered by the town, was as follows:

"Voted, To give Mr. Hill one hundred and sixty pounds, settlement; sixty pounds to be paid in specie, one half of which, is to be paid in three months after his ordination, the other half, to be paid in nine months. The one hundred pounds to be paid in beef cattle, Equal to beef at twenty shillings per hundred, or other neet stock Equivilent; sd. beef to be paid the fifteenth day of October, after his ordination.

"Voted, To give Mr. Hill sixty pounds salary for the first year, and to add Twenty shillings a year, until it arrive to the sum of sixty-eight pounds, and also,

"Voted, To give Mr. Hill thirty cords of wood, delivered at his house, the salary and wood to be paid annually, so long as Mr. Hill shall perform the work of a gospel minister, in this place.

"Voted, That when the majority of the Church and Town shall agree to invite a council, to settle any difficulty, if any should arise between pastor and church and Town, that Mr. Hill be obligated to join with the church and town, in a mutual council."

At a subsequent meeting, December 24th, 1789, the offer was modified by the following vote:

"Voted, To alter the payment of Mr. Ebenezer Hill's salary as it now stands, in the proposals which the town has made to him, and to pay the said salary, annually, so long as he shall remain our gospel minister." This was, undoubtedly, intended to apply to, and modify that provision of the

Digitized by Google

former offer, which limited the payment of the salary, by the phrase "so long as Mr. Hill shall perform the work of a gospel minister in this place." This made the payment contingent on services actually performed. The contract by which a preacher was settled, as the pastor of a church and minister of a town, was then regarded as indissoluble, without fault on the part of the minister, as the marriage contract was then esteemed to be. Hence it followed, that if the minister should become disabled from disease or old age, to perform "the work of a gospel minister," he was still entitled to claim and receive his stipend, and the people were not permitted, after having enjoyed the best services of his youth and vigorous manhood, to turn him adrift in his old age, laboring under poverty and infirmity, to spend his last days in penury and misery. The clergy were particularly cautious, not to permit any stipulations looking to an abridgement of this right, to be incorporated into the contract; on the other hand, the people were somewhat inclined to entertain the notion, that the principle of no work, no pay, should apply to these, as well as to other contracts. These ideas, doubtless, had something to do with the framing of this proposed contract, and of the modification, adopted at the second meeting. These were old world notions. As the French say, "All this, we have changed." Now the contract between ministers and people, has little more permanency than a hiring from year to year, and, from the frequency with which divorces are sought, and the ease with which they are obtained, in some parts of our country, the marriage contract is fast verging to the same miserable state. It is sufficient to say, that this call was not accepted; for what particular reasons, does not appear. He had, at the same time, under consideration, a similar call from the church and people in Mason, which was first in point of time, and was by him finally accepted; but he ever entertained for the people of Marlborough, an affectionate regard.

His first introduction to Mason, the scene of his future

Digitized by Google

labors, in which his life was to be spent, was undoubtedly, through the Rev. Samuel Dix, of Townsend, with whom he formed an acquaintance while residing at Westford, or at Rindge, which ended, only with the life of that worthy gentleman. Addressed "To Mr. Ebenezer Hill, at Rindge," is a letter, of which the following is a copy:

"MR. HILL:—I am desired in behalf of the town of Mason, to request you to preach with them four Sabbaths; to begin, the first or second in April next. They wish to know soon, whether you comply or not; if you please to send the information to me, I will convey it to them, by divine permission; I mean, in case you can't bring it yourself, to your friend and servant, SAM'L DIX."

TOWNSEND, May 20th, 1789.

There is, undoubtedly, a mistake in the date of this letter. It should be March, instead of May. This invitation was complied with. It appears by the minutes of the Holles Association, that at their meeting at Townsend, July 1st, 1789, there were present as "company, the Rev. Mr. Bullard, of Pepperell, and Mr. Hill, a candidate preaching at Mason."

In coming to this, his future home, he came to no place of ease, no well cultivated garden spot, where the young preacher was to find a polished people, a full salary, and to enjoy the opportunity for becoming a scholar, a theologian; but he came to an uncultivated field, which demanded, from its occupant, the most laborious toil, in order for success. The people were poor, unpolished in manners, but sincerely desirous of the establishment of the institutions of religion among them, and ready to receive their minister, with open hand and heart. The "Gaius, mine host" who first received and entertained this youthful apostle, upon his entry into this his future diocese, was the worthy and excellent Jason Dunster, a lineal descendant of Henry Dunster, the first president of Harvard college. He then resided in the south-east part of the town. Mr. Dunster, then an aged man, remained his firm and unwavering friend, to the close of

Digitized by Google

his life. The mode of travelling in those days, was on horseback, the wayfarer taking with him his scanty wardrobe, and a few books, and manuscript sermons in his saddle-bags. There were then, no wheeled carriages in the town, except the ox-carts, and no vehicle for winter conveyance, except the ox-sleds and pungs, a coarsely-made box, placed upon runners, and drawn by one or more horses. The roads were rough, and by no means free from stumps and stones; so that the means of passing from place to place, were only those just described, or the more primitive method, the use of the sturdy limbs furnished by nature to all well made up men and women.

His services as a minister, seem to have been from the first, very acceptable to the people of his future charge, and he continued to preach in the place, with a few interruptions of time, spent in other places, until his final settlement and ordination. Soon after coming into town, he became domesticated in the pleasant family of Mr. John Winship, in which he resided most of the time, till he was married, and could sit down by his own domestic hearth. For this worthy family, he always entertained an affectionate regard. It seems, that after fulfilling his first engagement at Mason, of "four sabbaths," probably extended to a few more weeks, he preached at Ashby, at which place he was employed in August, 1789; as appears, by the letter of the meeting house committee of Mason, dated August 29th, 1789, addressed to him at Asbby; which has been inserted in the History of Mason, page 111.

The people of Mason, without any long trial of their candidate, determined to invite him to become their minister. A church meeting for this purpose, was held October 13th, 1789. Just seventeen years before that time, October 13th, 1772, the meeting was held for the gathering and formation of the church, into an ecclesiastical body. The church, at this meeting, at which the Rev. Mr. Dix presided, voted, unanimously, to invite Mr. Hill to become their pastor. In

Digitized by Google

this action of the church, the town concurred by their votes, at a meeting held on the 16th of October. Copies of the votes of the town and of the church were communicated to him.

Thus, was presented to him, the most important question he would be called upon to decide in his long life; one, upon which his happiness as a man, and his usefulness as a public teacher and minister of the word of God, was mainly to depend. The prospect was far from cheering. There were many discouragements. The town was small, and the inhabitants few in number. They were poor, and there was little promise that they would ever be otherwise. Their sole employment was agriculture, except the few handicrafts always found in agricultural communities, and the character of the hard, stubborn, rocky soil was such, as to afford promise of rather scanty harvests, and no anticipations of rapid improvement. But, on the other hand, the people were industrious, temperate, frugal, warm-hearted, ready to do according to their best ability for his comfort and support.

The church formed October 13, 1772, then consisting of twenty-one members, twelve men and nine women, had hardly kept its numbers good. Unhappy difficulties arose, soon after the settlement of their first minister, the Rev. Jonathan Searle. He was dismissed August 14th, 1781. After his dismission, they had procured a temporary supply, from time to time, and had invited several preachers to settle with them but all the invitations had been declined. Only one member had been added to the communion, for more than thirteen years, and he, Jonathan Chandler, by letter, from the church in Grafton.

But there were circumstances of encouragement. The neighboring ministers, particularly Dix of Townsend, and Farrar of New Ipswich, were anxious to welcome him as a fellow-laborer, and to have the waste place which this church had, for so many years exhibited, built up. In 1785, a religious revival, of a remarkable character, took place in New Ipswich, in which the neighboring towns, and particularly the

Digitized by Google

town of Mason, largely shared. Many of the young persons in that town, on becoming subjects of the revival, had united with the church in New Ipswich. All these were now ready, in prospect of the re-establishment of gospel ordinances, to remove their church-membership to Mason church; and many inhabitants of the town, members of churches in the places in which they had formerly lived, were ready to remove their membership to this church. These, uniting with the remaining members of the church, constituted at the time of his ordination, a body of thirty-six in number, ready to receive him as their pastor and teacher.

After due consideration, in July or August, 1790, he gave his answer to this call in the affirmative, accepting the invitation. In pursuance of these proceedings, an ecclesiastical council was called, which met on the second day of November, 1790, and, having made the necessary examinations and arrangements therefor, on the next day, they proceeded to ordain him, as pastor of the church. For the details of the votes of the church and of the town, his answer to their call and the proceedings of the council, reference may be had to the History of the town of Mason, pages 111 to 119.

His inducements to accept this invitation, rather than that of Marlborough, appear in a letter to a friend, under date of May 5th, 1790. He writes, "I have tried to think it was my duty to settle at Marlborough, but it appears quite plain to me, that Providence has pointed out Mason as the place. I think I never saw such an union, and such engagedness, as is apparent in this place. What their motives are, I am not able to say, but trust, with regard to the greater part, they are gospel motives, and upon the whole, I dare not deny them."

The provision for his support amounted to $250 a year, a very moderate stipend upon which to sustain a family and keep up the hospitality which was then expected of the clergy, and generally maintained by them. It was, however, considering the habits of living of the times, quite as ade-

Digitized by Google

quate for that purpose, as the compensation now paid generally by country parishes to their clergymen. It was a matter belonging to the town, in its municipal capacity, to see that this sum was paid, which was done by levying and collecting a tax upon the poll and estates of all the inhabitants and land-holders in the town, except such as by the laws of the land were excused from the payment, by reason of their membership of other religious societies.

According to the provisions of the charter, by which the title to the lands in the town was granted, see History of Mason, page 28, he would, in addition to the sum of seventy five pounds annual salary, be entitled to the use of the lands granted "for the use of the ministry"; but at the meeting held October 16, 1789, immediately after passing a vote to concur "with the church in giving Mr. Ebenezer Hill a call into the work of the Gospel Ministry," the town "Voted, To Reserve the Ministry Rite of land in this Town for the use of sd. Town." This assumption, on the part of the town, of the right to appropriate this land to any other use than that limited in the original grant, was clearly without authority. The land was never the property of the town, and the town could grant no lawful title to it. It was not *given* to the town, but was reserved out of the grant, by the proprietors of the whole township, "for the use of the ministry." No action of the town could lawfully divert it from that use, or apply it to any other purpose; much less could the town sell it, and give any valid title to a purchaser. No doubt, the fathers thought they had a right to do as they pleased with it. The land was subsequently sold by the town, and the proceeds paid into the town treasury, and applied to the ordinary town charges; and thus a provision intended by the grantors of the town for the support of the ministry, was, in violation of law, at this early period, diverted from its original object, and, so far as that purpose was concerned, entirely lost.

Of course, he was the servant, or in other words, the minister of the town; all of the people had a right to attend on

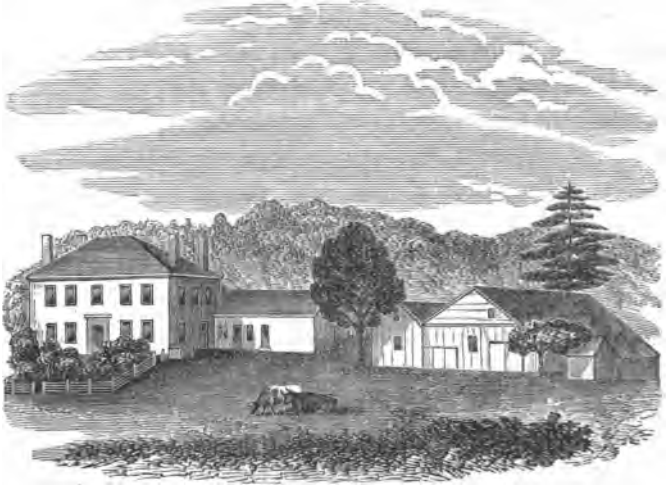
Digitized by Google

the public worship as conducted by him, and for that purpose, ample provision was made, for the accommodation in the meeting house, without charge, of all who, for want of means, or other reasons, were not provided with pews, or seats in pews. There was no other society or meeting in town than his, for many years, except a small society of Baptists, composed of residents in this, and some of the neighboring towns, who had religious services a part of the time in town. He was expected to visit all in sickness and affliction, and attend to the burial of the dead. These services he considered it a part of his duty to do, and he performed them faithfully, at all seasons, postponing thereto all considerations of private business, convenience, or inclination. In the sick room and in the house of mourning, he was always received as a welcome visitor. His addresses and ministrations on funeral occasions, were remarkable for appropriateness, solemnity and tenderness. Many of his discourses on such occasions were, at the request of the friends of the departed, published, of which a list will be found at the close of this memoir. From the time of his ordination until he ceased to take any active share in parochial affairs, he kept an accurate record of all marriages by him celebrated, and also of the death of all persons occurring in the town, generally with some indication of the disease and of the age of the decedent. Both these records are inserted in the History of Mason.

But it is time to resume the narrative of his life and labors. Having found and united himself with a church and people, he forthwith proceeded to supply the next great want of a New England clergyman, a domestic household. This he formed, by uniting in marriage with Mary Boynton, of Westford. They were married by the Rev. Samuel Dix, of Townsend, February 2, 1791. As early as March of this year, he commenced a negotiation with John Bishop & Son, of Medford, for the purchase of the farm formerly owned by Capt. William Chambers, and then owned by these gentlemen.

Digitized by Google

This negotiation resulted in a purchase of the place, and he thus secured for himself a home, in which he spent all the remainder of his days. To this first purchase, he afterwards added, at different times, a meadow lot, a wood lot and a pasture, making in all a productive and valuable farm. This was a fortunate proceeding on his part, as this farm rendered him, in a good degree, independent. The house was small. It was one of the oldest buildings in the town. It stood in



the garden, a little distance north and west of the present edifice. The first house on the farm, was built in the north-west corner of the old orchard, where the remains of the cellar, now mark the place. It was occupied many years as a tavern, by Samuel Abbott. It was the nearest dwelling to the old meeting house, and on occasion of town meetings, in the cold winter weather, the fathers would adjourn to Mr. Abbott's tavern, to warm up. The road then passed east of the site of the present buildings; a view of which is here presented. The wall on the west side of the old orchard, was the boundary of the road, which came into the road now travelled near the school house. The road leading to New Ipswich, left the road opposite Abbott's tavern, and making

Digitized by Google

a curve, came into the road as now travelled, on the site of the town house.

About the year 1799, he commenced the erection of a comfortable and commodious dwelling, to which he removed in the year 1800.

This mansion was built in the most substantial manner, in a fashion common at that day, though now seldom copied. The rooms are large and square, and in the internal arrangements, as well as outward appearance, it presents a marked contrast to the dwellings in the now prevailing fashionable, sharp, zigzag, multi-angular, modern style, in which the object of the architect seems to be, to multiply corners rather than comforts. In the frame, more timber was used, than would now be employed in the construction of five houses of the same size. The form of the roof, though perhaps, not the most convenient, is one that gives the greatest strength and power of resistance to tempests. This quality of the roof was severely tested, in the most violent tempest which has visited the coast of New England within the last hundred years, known and remembered as the September gale of 1815. This gale, driving from the south-east, and meeting with nothing on its way from the ocean, to break its force, burst with its full power upon this dwelling. The two tall chimneys upon the southern side, were, by the force of the gale, at the same instant broken off, at the point where they issued from the roof, and fell with a thundering crash upon the roof, where shattered in peices, they lay till the storm abated, when it was found that the roof had escaped uninjured, needing but a few shingles to be replaced, to make it perfectly sound; the weight of the falling mass having been received and sustained by the corner rafters of the roof. Such a mass of brick and mortar, thus falling upon a roof of the common form, would have broken it through, and exposed the whole roof, to be torn into fragments and carried away by the tempest; leading, probably, to a total destruction of the edifice.

Digitized by Google

The wood seen in this view, on the east, in rear of the buildings, is a portion of the native forest, composed in great part of white oaks, hickories, chestnuts and pines; among which, one of the monarchs of the original forest is conspicuous. This wood, he protected and cherished with great care, and it has now become one of the most valuable timber lots in the vicinity.

By means of the farm, with the aid of his salary, he brought up and educated, in a respectable and creditable manner, a numerous family, and had always a seat at his board and fireside, and a spare couch for his brethren of the clergy, who were always made welcome, whether coming from near or distant parts, to his hospitality, and sent on their way, on their departure, rejoicing. Many a poor student on crossing his threshold, has felt that he was in a haven of rest and comfort. For such, he felt great sympathy, remembering that he was once himself, a poor student.

It is proper here to state, that in some years he was in a great measure deprived of the benefit of his salary, by the facility with which he was induced to give orders, anticipating the payment of it in favor of persons, who applied to him for pecuniary aid, and who frequently made very inadequate returns to him for the aid so received.

During the first twelve years of his ministry, there was nothing of a marked character exhibited, in the religious condition of his parish; there were no revivals, and no indications of any rapid changes among his people. The seed was carefully sown, but seemed to germinate slowly. The regular services of the Sabbath, were two long written sermons. There were but few meetings of any kind, during the week, except the lecture preparatory to the regular bimonthly celebration of the Lord's supper. These discourses were delivered in a meeting house, in which no fire was ever found, however severe the winter weather might be. The first use of stoves for warming the meeting house, was in the winter of 1820–'21.

Digitized by Google

But if the first twelve years were not distinguished by success in his work, they were a period of singular and severe trials to himself, in his domestic relations, such as to leave their traces on his character ever after. With his first wife, he lived but three years and one month. She died March 2d, 1794, aged twenty-nine years.

After a single life of a year and a half, he married (November 18th, 1795) Mrs. Rebecca Howard, widow of Samuel Howard, and daughter of Col. Ebenezer Bancroft, of Tyngsborough, Mass. But his house was soon again left desolate. Consumption took from him the second wife July 2d, 1797. She was twenty-six years and four months of age.

On the 27th of September, 1799, he married Mrs. Abigail Stearns, widow of Edward Stearns, and daughter of Col. Timothy Jones of Bedford, Mass. With her he lived in great harmony and happiness, the remainder of his days, and she still lingers in lonely widowhood, at the home now desolate, where for many years, a numerous and happy family was gathered.

These severe afflictions seem to have had an important influence upon his character; they gave him a capacity to appreciate scenes of sorrow, and enabled him to sympathize with, and console those who were in trial.

It has already been remarked, that the first years of his ministry, were not distinguished by any particular and striking indications of progress. It was a time of quiet labor, and preparation for future harvest. In a country community, receiving no accessions from abroad, and sending off constantly, many of its most enterprising young people to the cities, and to Vermont and New York, the then distant West, the increase of the church, was usually slow and silent.

In 1802, there was a revival season, which resulted in the addition of forty-four persons to the church. Again in 1812, there was another season of revival, by which twenty-five persons were brought into the church. From this time, until 1826, no time of particular attention to religion, occurred.

Digitized by Google

From time to time, persons united with the church, but no period of general interest was seen.

In the year 1826–'27, there occurred a more general and powerful revival, than had ever been known in Mason. It was a genuine work of grace, and had immediate and permanent effects upon the church and town. Many who have been influential and decided christians, entered the church at that time. The season was one of constant and arduous labor for the pastor; he preached almost incessantly on week days, in the school houses, and in the private houses of the town, and held frequent meetings for conference and inquiry, that he might know the state of all, and adapt his instructions to their condition.

Rev. John Spaulding, who is pleasantly remembered for his participation in the labors of that season, has furnished some important items, respecting it. He says in a letter, "It was my privilege to be a co-worker with him, to witness the joy of the harvest, as he garnered the seed long before sown. How many scenes and incidents during that work, never to be forgotten! That first prayer-meeting of the youth at the house of Mr. W., one of the daughters of the pastor, there being so impressed, that she went home to weep and to pray, and to give her heart to Christ, that very night. The many meetings for inquiry and prayer, in the pastor's house, meetings of weeping and joy! I seem still to see the heaven-lighted countenance of the good pastor glow, as successively informed that one and another and another, perhaps the last and least expected, had given the heart to Christ."

Several letters of his own remain, in which he gives many facts, concerning this deeply interesting work. From these letters, a better idea of that work can be formed, than from any other source, now accessible. The first of these, is a letter to his son in New York, dated Mason, March 15, 1826. An extract from which, is as follows: "It is with humble gratitude, that I can give you some intelligence more pleasing

Digitized by Google

than I could have done a few weeks since. God is manifestly visiting this long barren spot, with some tokens of his special favor. There is, more than formerly, a degree of serious attention in some sections of the town, but it is not general. Religious meetings are frequent in some school houses. Some persons are now, under serious impressions, some greatly distressed, and a few, are already rejoicing in hope of salvation; and many others appear to listen and hear, with attention and feeling. ****** **** has had a most distressing season for some weeks, so as not to attend to any work, but he appears to have found relief, and has a supporting hope. None have as yet, joined our church. We hope these are but the first-fruits of a large harvest. The Lord in his mercy grant that I may be able soon to give you a richer account of the displays of his grace, among the people of Mason." The second letter, giving a fuller account, is as follows:

MASON, May 1, 1826.

MY DEAR SON:—My time is so much taken up attending meetings, preaching, &c. that I can spare but little for writing now, and as I scarcely know any thing that is doing on the farm, shall not attempt to tell you any thing concerning it or other worldly affairs. I attend one or more meetings every day in the week, except Saturday. The attention to religion yet increases. It first appeared in the westerly part of the town and has extended on to the east, like the progress of a cloud driven by the wind and shedding down rain. At present it seems confined to Mason in a great measure, if not entirely. You remember that a few years since, the neighboring towns had a refreshing shower, while not a drop fell on this barren spot. It seemed as if the very lines of the town were a barrier to the influences of the Spirit. I pray that the present refreshing cloud may spread over all our region. I have not ascertained exactly the number of hopeful converts, but it is probably not much from eighty, in both societies, (the Congregationalist and Baptist.) Thus far the

Digitized by Google

work has been different from what has been common in works of revival and reformation. It is principally among the middle aged and heads of families, and the greater part of them men; comparatively few young men have yet been subjects of converting grace. It is devoutly hoped that where stubborn, irreligious heads of families are made to bow, there is a blessing in reserve for their children. I mourn to see so little effect on my own family. This day, the concert of prayer was attended, the fullest I have attended in Mason. After that, an enquiry meeting was held at my house; more than forty persons present, not all enquirers. This evening, a very full conference, at J. W's. I have noticed above, stubborn heads of families, but here remark, some of the most moral and regular, have been subjects of as deep and pungent conviction as any. Their names will convey to you all that is needful, to show you that the most moral and immoral, are included in this work of grace. * * *

I have mentioned these persons, to give you some view of the wonderful work. Several of these men I have named, have their wives with them, either rejoicing in hope, or tremblingly anxious. And I must name to you, as trophies of divine grace, the distinguishcd worldlings, * * * * * * * * and * * * * * * * * * * * *. I must not omit to mention your friend, W. B. He has had a long season of conviction, but has now a very comfortable, if not joyful hope. In short, the greater part of the people of the town, are unusually thoughtful. It is late, and I am weary. I can write no more, only to commend you to God, and the riches of his grace, and devoutly pray that you may share, and your brothers and sisters, in the same divine mercy here displayed.

From your Father,

EBEN^{R}. HILL.

The next letter written to the same son, further described the progress of the revival.

Digitized by Google

MASON, January 12, 1827.

DEAR SON:—* * * * As for news from this region, the report is, the general state of health is good. The weather has been very mild and open until Christmas, then we began to experience *Christmas weather.* The ground continued bare until new year's day, when a severe snow storm commenced, and now we have an *old fashioned winter,* snow sufficiently deep, and drifts sufficiently large.

But to come to matters of more importance than all worldly concerns. The state and progress of religion, I think, is still promising in this town. After an apparent declension for some weeks, of the religious excitement and attention which had existed and been so powerful here, in some parts of the town, there is a manifest increased attention. There has been a short wintry season. Christians feared the work of grace was over. They were affected to see the multitude left out of the ark, and, I believe, gave themselves to prayer. The church met once and again for conference, to enquire into their own state of feeling, and to search for the causes of the work of God declining. Their hopes now begin to revive. In some parts of the town, the meetings are full and solemn. Two new cases of deep concern, and at least of conviction of danger, have come to knowledge this week. The last week, Mr. ——, who has been wading in deep waters since last spring, fearing for himself, yet contending against God, has discovered that nothing was in the way of his salvation, but his own wicked, rebellious heart, and has joyfully bowed in submission. His difficulties all removed, so that he wondered at them, and thought he could show every one the way so that they *must* see it. Alas! he cannot make them open their eyes. I hope when I write to you again, I shall be able to write you more similar interesting facts. Through the goodness of God, we are all in health.

From your affectionate Father,

EBEN^{R}. HILL.

Digitized by Google

Three days later he wrote to his eldest son, residing in Tennessee. In the following extracts from this letter, some additional facts are stated.

MASON, January 15, 1827.

MY DEAR CHILDREN:—* * * * I have another reason however, for not writing many letters in the year that is passed. We have had a season of unusual religious attention. The revival began in the winter, and for a time, very few, if any in all the town, were not unusually thoughtful and solemn. For six or eight months, I preached as often as once a day, or nearly, besides on the sabbath, and attended many other meetings. You must be sensible my time has been fully occupied, nevertheless, I have not forgotten, but daily remembered my absent, far distant children. O! may they be the happy partakers of that mercy and grace, which has been displayed here. We have received into the church, sixty-seven members. Above thirty have joined the Baptist church. Probably fifty more entertain hope in Christ. And although the work seems to have abated, new cases of serious concern occur. Among those who have made profession of religion, are our principal young married men, who are taking the places of their fathers, gone and going off the stage. Of my family, only Lucy has made a profession of religion. I hope the rest are not all without some well-grounded hope, of having chosen the better part. O! could I hear from my distant children, that they are wise for themselves, this would indeed be good news from a far country. Will you not each one, at my request, on the receipt of this letter, sit down and calculate what will be the real profit, to gain the whole world and lose the soul. Since the soul may be lost, and if lost, it is forever lost, every dictate of reason and prudence, urge to attend to the salvation of the soul, before any other concern. We may trifle with solemn subjects, we may frame or admit as forcible, arguments which may make us careless about our souls, or may quiet our minds, when but little moved, but so long as awake to our

Digitized by Google

eternal well-being, nothing but hope like an anchor, can support us; and O! eternity is near! and as surely as God is holy, so must we be holy, to be happy in him. Consider, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" After death, there can be no change until the judgment, the sentence then will be eternal. * * * * *

From your affectionate Father,

EBEN^{R}. HILL.

Such letters as these, show something of the rise and progress of this interesting work of grace, and also, exhibit the pastor's uprightness and skill in the work before him. The direct results of that revival, were the addition of eighty-six members to the Congregational church, and also, a large number to the Baptist church. Religious things were in a better state, for many years following that interesting season, than they had ever been in Mason. There were no new measures used, no protracted meetings in the more recent acceptation of that term, and not much preaching, except by the pastor, and Mr. John Spaulding, a young minister, who was his particular assistant. There was no effort made to gather numbers into the church, but an earnest effort to have all the professed converts well indoctrinated, and thoroughly acquainted with practical religious truth. Time has given good evidence for the greater part of those converts, shewing that they were the children of grace; they have been prominent in all the religious affairs of the town, from that time until the present; they are now found the active members of the churches of Mason and other places, while some of them have gone home, leaving behind them evidence that they sleep in Jesus.

In 1831, the report of the meetings held in Western New York under the name of "three days meetings," attracted attention abroad, and gave rise to the idea of having them in other sections, and on the 19th of April, 1831, a *three days*

Digitized by Google

meeting was commenced in Mason. It was a new thing, and attracted much attention. Many persons who had not been in the habit of attending religious meetings, were induced to come where the gospel was preached, and there was a general attention to religion among all classes of people, for a time. Several persons were added to the church, apparently the fruits of this meeting and the state of things that followed it, but nothing like a general revival took place.

In 1835, there was a time of religious interest, which resulted in the gathering of thirty-eight persons into the church. This was the last season of revival while Mr. Hill remained sole pastor of the church, and during this season, he was aided for several weeks, by a young man of very decided ability, but somewhat erratic, who did not always carry out the views of the pastor and the more judicious members of the church.

These seasons of revival, were the most prominent points of the long pastoral life of the subject of this sketch; they were the harvests of the seed sown in quietness, and watched and waited for with care, at times when no direct results were apparent. Such times and seasons, when free from sectarian zeal, and when they are, as these were, the outgrowth of quiet, permanent influences, are the richest rewards of the pastor's life, seasons of his highest joy and most satisfactory labor, glorious harvest scenes, when the souls of men are gathered into the kingdom of God. Blessed is that minister, whose manner of preaching and course of life, is best adapted to induce and promote them.

While attention should be directed to the seasons of revival in a particular manner, there are many things of a different character, details of common, practical life, that need to be given, in order to exhibit a distinct idea of a New England pastorship, and the general customs of that region during the period of his life. The customs of society are always silently changing, and the changes are, perhaps, as manifest in religious things, as in any other. These

Digitized by Google

changes, are also better seen in reviewing the long life of a single individual, than in any other way.

During Mr. Hill's life as a minister, the most remarkable religious revolution that has ever been seen in New England, began, and passed on to its full development; it was the rise and progress of Unitarianism. The germs of this movement, are found much farther back, but there was nothing of it visible, for years after he began his active ministry. The Calvinism of the puritans, preserved the forms of its ancient life for many years after its spirit ceased to live in the heart of many of the churches. Few of the New England churches passed through the period of the war of the Revolution, retaining their ancient doctrine and spirit entirely unchanged. But the development of principles is always slow, and it was a long time before this departure from the ancient faith, became fully evident. The time at length came, when those holding doctrines so unlike as the Arminian or Socinian and Calvinistic, could no longer walk together in the same religious fellowship; division must take place. A large majority of the churches in that section of New England, were divided into parties, known as Orthodox and Unitarian. It was a time of difficulty and trial; a time, when the ties that had bound neighbors and families for years in harmony, were to be violently sundered, and two churches, often hostile to each other, or at least, one party feeling that they had been deeply wronged, were found, where but one had been before. In this movement, the pastor of the church of Mason never was a prominent actor. His attachment to the Calvinistic form of doctrine was strong, and his avowal of his sentiments, bold and earnest; but he was never in a position to become a partisan.

Neither his natural disposition nor his habits of life, fitted him to be a polemic. In his own parish but little of the Unitarian element developed itself. The church at its organization, declared itself to be Calvinistic, upon the basis of doctrines set forth in the Westminster Assembly's Catechism.

Digitized by Google

Such had always been the faith of its pastor, and in this faith the church and people had been carefully instructed. At an equal remove from the Arminianism of some of the churches in the region, and the Hopkinsianism of others, this church had ever held, with its pastor, a middle ground; not a middle ground of compromises and concessions, but of sound and rational interpretation and reception of doctrines. But although not called upon to meet and combat in his own parish, what he viewed to be erroneous doctrines, he could not look with indifference on the struggle which took place between the old and new doctrines in his neighborhood. In this controversy the rule he adopted and followed, was that to which he adhered through his long life, that is, first to ascertain what is duty, and then to the extent of his ability to do it, without passion, haste or undue feeling or excitement. In two of the adjoining towns, this disturbing element appeared, to the interruption of the ancient harmony and fellowship. In this contingency he, without hesitation, placed himself on the side of those who held to the ancient faith, and aided them by his council and services, and encouraged them to establish for themselves, a church organization, and the institutions of public worship.

In the first portion of his pastorship, the system of Sabbath School instruction, as now practiced, was not known in this region. But though that important aid, now considered absolutely necessary to the well-being of every church, did not then exist, its place was in a good degree supplied, by the careful attention given to catechetical instruction. In this way, many minds were more thoroughly indoctrinated, than most are, who are taught in the Sabbath Schools of these days. The following extract, from a letter written by one trained in his congregation, gives a picture of the manner of instruction then pursued.

"The last Sabbath of every month, I think it was, the children, not only of the church but of the parish, were gathered together, and seated on the long seats in front of

Digitized by Google

the pulpit, the girls on the right hand, and the boys on the left of the broad aisle, to be catechised. Those were happy, pleasant times, I can assure you. Many happy faces were seen on catechising day, as it was called. This was all the real public, personal instruction the children received, when I was young; and, in truth, it was a great and everlasting blessing, to both parents and children; it was "line upon line, and precept upon precept," not soon to be forgotten."

In this matter of the catechism, his precept and example coincided, for he was ever careful to train his own family, into a thorough knowledge of its principles. His usual custom was, to assemble his whole family on Sabbath afternoon, after the second service, and go through the whole of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism, with great care, interfusing as he went, his own illustrations and comments. This was continued, until the youngest of his family had been trained through it. But although he was attached to the catechism, he hailed with joy the rise of Sabbath Schools. A Sabbath School was permanently established in his congregation, about the year 1816. At that time, he preached a sermon from Eccl. 11. 6: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." The same person who has described his manner of catechetical instruction, also describes the introduction of Sabbath Schools, as follows: "Mr. Hill made several trials to have a Sabbath School, but failed, for want of suitable superintendents and teachers. Sometimes a few persons would collect together for a few Sabbaths, and recite verses of hymns, learned probably, years before at home, and a few chapters of the Bible, and then drop away one by one, as their stock of hymns wore away, and the novelty wore off. The first Sabbath School that was kept through the summer, was in 1816. * * * was the superintendent. Three or four females were found, who would go in and hear the children recite their lessons.

Digitized by Google

It was the first Sabbath School I ever attended. * * * would open the school with prayer, and then leave. Sometimes he would return in season to close the school, and sometimes we would get tired of waiting, and leave for our dinner. The children had something set down to them, according to the number of verses recited, and when it amounted to one cent, a ticket was given. At the close of the school, the account was reckoned up, and a reward to the value of what each child had earned, was given. From the commencement of the Sabbath School, the [public] catechising was given up."

In his care for his people, Mr. Hill was an industrious pastor, watching closely every opportunity to interest and benefit them. The sick and the afflicted in every part of the town, and of every denomination and character, shared his parochial care. He considered himself the servant of the whole town, and felt bound to render them all the aid in his power. Whenever any accident or calamity occurred, he was among the first to be sent for, and often, on like occasions, he was called to neighboring towns. Many in town, who neither did anything for his support, nor attended his church, were sure to send for him in time of affliction. A careful observer of disease, his opinions and judgment respecting the condition and prospects of the sick, were often sought for, although he never in any way, intruded upon the physician's profession. A quiet self-possession which never forsook him, and a general knowledge of the common principles of physiology, enabled him often in cases of emergency to render useful services, one marked instance of which occurred at Townsend. It was on the occasion of the preparatory lecture, which he was to preach. The services had just commenced, when a sudden shower arising the house was struck by lightning, and one of the worshipers was left apparently dead. It was a scene of confusion and dismay, in which no one seemed to know what should be done. He at once interfered and directed what should be done, and saw to the exe-

Digitized by Google

cution of his orders, with so much promptness and efficacy, that the happy result was the perfect restoration to life and eventually to health, of the apparently lifeless sufferer.

An incident illustrating the character of Mr. Hill, and shewing the confidence which was placed in him by his parishioners, is related thus: One of the members of his church, feeling himself aggrieved with his pastor, on account of some matters growing out of the politics of the day, made a complaint against him to the church, which resulted in the calling of a council, before which, the matter was to be laid. As the time for the hearing approached, the complainant found that it was necessary on his part, that the subject matter of his complaint, should be put in proper form, to be presented to the council. The brother, having exhausted his own skill in his efforts to draw up, and present his complaint in proper form, and not succeeding to his mind, finally brought his papers to his accused pastor, whom he was about to bring for trial before the council, and asked his aid in putting his accusation into proper form, which was readily and cheerfully given. It may be added, that the council, a large part of which, were the political friends of the complaining brother, after the hearing, by an unanimous vote, exonerated the pastor fully, from all the charges in the complaint.

Thus time passed rapidly on, bringing the various changes related above, and Mr. Hill, leading a quiet and cheerful life, was silently growing old. In 1836, he was by far the oldest active pastor, in that region of country, and although apparently as well able to perform the duties of his office, as he had ever been, he proposed of his own accord, to his people, that they should select a young man as colleague with him, in the pastorship of the church, offering, at the same time, to relinquish his whole salary, in order that the younger man might receive a support. On this subject, Rev. John Spaulding, who was the one first written to by the church, to act as colleague, says "Sometime before he resigned, and before his people agitated that question, he called a public meeting

Digitized by Google

of his people, and reminded them that he was growing old, expressed his willingness to resign, and suggested the appointment of a committee to nominate a successor. The committee was appointed, including himself as chairman. In behalf of the committee and the congregation, he addressed me on the subject, and after urging various reasons why I should leave a western for an eastern field of labor, he characteristically remarked, "I wish to resign my pastoral charge, now, while I am in full possession of my mental faculties, lest, in remaining longer, they become so impaired, I shall be unwilling to resign." The proposed arrangement was made in the most amicable manner, with the undiminished confidence and regard of all parties. Mr. Hill performed all his duties as before, until a colleague was found in the Rev. Andrew H. Reed, who was installed November the 23d, 1836.

A new society having been formed in connection with the church, a new meeting house was builtIn 1837, leaving the old one to stand unoccupied, and Mr. Hill took leave of the place where he had spent so many happy Sabbaths. In his farewell sermon delivered in the old meeting house, in November, 1837, on taking leave of that edifice, he declared of the pulpit in which he was then standing, "This is the dearest spot on earth to me." In this sermon, he reviewed the history of the church, during the period of its occupancy of that house. It is thought that this sermon is worthy of preservation, and it is included among his discourses inserted in this volume.

Mr. Reed remained until December 11th, 1839, when he was, at his own request, dismissed, and Mr. Hill again resumed his post as an active pastor, and continued his labors, until he was succeeded by his own son, Joseph Bancroft Hill, who began his labors in August 1st, 1840, and was installed as co-pastor, October 20th, 1841. Mr. J. B. Hill remained, until preparations were made for the division of the church, for the purpose of forming the Mason village

Digitized by Google

church, in February, 1847, after which at his own request, his pastoral relation was dissolved, by the result of a council held April 22d, 1847. The church did not secure a permanent pastor, until 1851, when the Rev. J. L. Armes was installed as colleague with Mr. Hill, and he remained pastor until the decease of Mr. Hill.

Mr. Hill was always fond of preaching. The gospel was to him, a great reality, and he was happy in his work, as a herald of its glorious truth. After his retirement from the active duties of his own parish, he still continued to preach, for many years. He preached regularly for some time in Sharon, and after the death of Rev. Mr. Tinker, of Ashby, he supplied the pulpit there, for a short time, but his most useful labors, were at Brookline. The church in Brookline was small, and disheartened by a series of untoward circumstances. Their meeting house, which, like the first houses in all that section, was built by the town, passed from their control, and they were left, few in number, as sheep without a shepherd. In this condition, they spoke of disbanding, and scattering to other towns, for the purposes of worship, but Mr. Hill encouraged them to remain together, and offered to preach for them until they could secure a pastor. He encouraged and aided them in their efforts to build a meeting house of their own, remaining with them as pastor, preaching in the school houses of the town. Soon after their house was completed, he met with a recent graduate of Andover, who was not then employed, and he was so much pleased with him, that he engaged him to preach for a single Sabbath, in Brookline, and he was there and heard him. So confident was he, that God had sent them the right man, at the right time, he at once informed the church that he should preach for them no more, and urged them to secure the services of the candidate without delay. They followed his advice, and the result was the settlement of the Rev. Daniel Goodwin over that church, and time has fully shown the wisdom of the choice. Mr. Goodwin in a letter to the writer, says "It was through

Digitized by Google

his (Mr. Hill's) agency alone, that I came to occupy this post."

In the year 1839, and again in 1840, Mr. Hill was elected by the town, a representative to the state legislature, and served as such, in the sessions of those years. He was never a political partisan, but he was firm and decided in his political views, and was well known as an advocate of the general policy of the whig party. While in Concord, he wrote to his youngest son, June 16th, 1839, "It has fallen to me, to perform the duty of chaplain, most of the time. Some of the members of the house, were opposed to having prayers by any person, yet there was a good majority for it, and it was determined that the service should be performed by the clergymen belonging to the house. When the search was made, it was found there were but two in the house, myself, and Mr. Whitaker of Weare, (a Free Will Baptist.) We have leave to invite others to perform with us." The following letter was written from the house of representatives, to the same son, then a member of Dartmouth College.

CONCORD, June 20th, 1840.

MY SON:—I received yours by Mr. B——, and was glad to hear of your health. I spent last Sabbath at home, and can inform you that all the family were then well. This week has hitherto been a noisy week; and I have been much wearied with it. I do not attempt to describe to you, the scenes of Wednesday. It has been calculated, that not less than seven thousand men formed and marched on to the hill in procession; and I should judge there were as many in the streets, and on the hill, as in the procession. There was speaking in abundance. General Wilson took up at least two hours, in a continued strain of eloquence. Our session is short, it will close Saturday morning. It has, on the whole, been a quiet and peaceable session; nothing of a very exciting nature has come forward, to stir up bad feelings. I send you a small sum of money, which I hope will be a supply for your present wants. I have full confidence that

Digitized by Google

you do, and that you will, use all the economy, that is necessary for a poor scholar to use. But I most earnestly desire, that while you are cultivating the mind, and laboring to fit yourself for usefulness, you will have great watchfulness over your heart, and strive to grow in grace. Ambition for distinction as a scholar, has often proved detrimental to spiritual improvement; your only safety is in continued prayer.

* * * * * *

From your Father,

EBEN^{R}. HILL.

At this time occurred an incident of a domestic character, which will long be remembered by his family; it was the meeting of his whole family, for the first and only time. Mr. Hill had a numerous family of children, and they were early and widely scattered from their father's house. The eldest left home, and settled in Fayetteville, Tennessee, before the birth of the youngest, and he did not revisit the place of his birth, until the youngest had grown up to manhood. In July, 1844, there was a meeting of all the living children, ten in number, at their father's house. It was a time of the deepest interest to all parties, of joy to the parents, at the sight of long absent children, pleasure among the children, of forming acquaintance with those they knew and loved by report, but who were strangers in fact.

The time spent together by the family, was quite short. The intercourse was most cheerful and social, but partook largely of a religious character; and the father threw a hallowed feeling of calm religious reverence, into his most common actions. The worship around the family altar, the visits at different places, were all full of tenderness, and cheerful religious emotion. After a few days spent together, the company separated, each to his home, and never met again.

Mr. Hill retained all his faculties, both of body and mind, with a good degree of activity, until about the year 1846, when he began perceptibly to fail in both. There was no sudden change, but a gradual decline of all his powers. His

Digitized by Google

health was good, but his strength was wasting away, his memory was broken, and his mind ceased to act with its accustomed vigor. It was the decline that knows no restoration; the shadows of evening, precursors of the sunset of life. About the last of 1851, the childhood of extreme old age began to come over him. There was little of sickness, or apparently of pain, but a gradual wasting away of strength, until about the middle of May, 1854, when, in consequence of having taken a slight cold, there was induced a low stage of fever, under which he suffered until the 20th day of May, 1854, when he quietly fell asleep. His exit from the scenes of time, was perfectly calm; there was not a struggle or a groan; his breathing grew difficult, short, and with intervals between each respiration, until it gently ceased forever. He slept in Jesus, on the morning of the 20th day of May, 1854, an old man, full of days. His age was eighty-eight years, three months, and twenty-one days.

On the 23d, his funeral took place. He was followed to the grave by a great concourse of relations, friends and parishioners. The day was calm and bright, in which he was laid to rest. The mild sunshine of spring fell upon the world of nature bursting into life; the trees and shrubs, many of which planted by his own hand, bordered the road leading from his dwelling to the graveyard, awaking from the death and sleep of winter to the bloom and verdure of spring, were emblems fit of the resurrection that awaits the good, after the winter of the grave. On such a day he was borne to his resting place, into which he had seen all but a few scattered surviving remnants of his original congregation, one after another, gathered. It was fitting that he too should slumber there, pastor and people together, until the final morning hour. Of the large concourse which followed him to the grave, few had known him before the meridian of life, and fewer still had witnessed his ordination day. But one person, who was a member of the church when he was ordained, survived him; and the church of this day is com-

Digitized by Google

posed mainly of the children and grandchildren of those who were his people then.

Thus within sight of the dwelling he had so long occupied, was he left to repose, in the ancient graveyard; "the garden of the dead," which in his latter years, he was wont frequently to visit, and there to spend the declining hours of the summer afternoon, calling up to recollection, the forms of the departed sleeping there; his family, his parishioners, his neighbors and intimate friends of two entire generations, whom he had attended to this, their last resting place, and whose company he was shortly expecting, and patiently waiting to join.

The funeral sermon was preached by the Rev. A. W. Burnham, of Rindge; the successor of his own venerated instructor, and for many years, a valued personal friend. The following extract from this discourse, exhibits the view therein presented of the personal and professional character of the deceased.

"As a man, our departed father was small in stature, but of a firm, vigorous, well constituted frame, of sound constitution, he enjoyed remarkable health, till overtaken by the infirmities of old age. It is a singular fact, that for fifty years he was detained from public worship, but two Sabbaths. Exceedingly amiable in his disposition, moderate in his temperament, a mind well balanced, conceptions clear, reasoning powers of no mean order, with no inconsiderable degree of shrewdness, he had a large share of that quality so much needed, but unhappily not possessed by every minister: good common sense, sense that could be used for good in the exigencies of life. In his deportment, grave, as befitting a minister of Christ, gentlemanly and courteous in his bearing, he was instructive in conversation, familiar and pleasant in all social intercourse, in the family, among his people, and his brethren.

In his domestic relations, true-hearted, kind and careful, he aimed to fulfil every conjugal and parental duty, in the

Digitized by Google

fear of God, and with a conscientious regard to the highest welfare of the numerous household, of which he was the head.

"As a christian, he appears to have had deep experience in spiritual graces. Profoundly reverent of God and sacred things, he was imbued with love to God, his house, people, word and worship, submissive in trials, patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope, and relying on Christ alone for acceptance, he aimed and was enabled to maintain a devout walk with God. As a theologian he was sound in the faith, holding the system of doctrines, usually denominated Calvinistic, as set forth in the Assembly's Catechism.

"As a preacher, plain, effective and impressive, he set forth with simplicity and earnestness, in the mode and style of the generation to which he belonged, the doctrines of the gospel in their true aspects and bearings, always careful to engraft upon them, the enforcement of practical godliness, as their genuine fruit.

"In his pastoral intercourse and duties, our reverend father set an example worthy to be imitated by all who hold the same office. Deeply interested in all that affected the welfare of his people, he was affectionate yet faithful, and having drunk deeply of the cup of affliction himself, he was able and ready to sympathize with his people, and administer to them the same consolations wherewith he himself was comforted, of God. And as he watched for souls, as one that must give an account, God gave him success in his ministry. While under his regular ministrations, the children of God were nourished up unto eternal life, and sinners were occasionally gathered into the fold; several seasons of spiritual refreshing, more or less general in their extent, and abundant in their fruits, were enjoyed. In those days, the pastor rejoiced, labored and prayed with a diligence, fervency and faithfulness becoming a minister of the gospel, and evincing the tender concern he cherished, for the spiritual welfare of the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made him overseer. In a

Digitized by Google

word, he was a good minister of Jesus Christ, one who studied to show himself approved of God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

One of his brethren in the ministry of a neighboring town, and who, in point of age, approached the nearest to the deceased, writes of the deceased, "He was a man of good intellectual powers, well educated, and his mind was well stored with theoretical and practical knowledge. He might have filled almost any department in public life, with credit and usefulness." Another, whose acquaintance with him commenced after old age had gently laid its hand upon him, writes as follows: "Were I to speak of him in general terms, I should say, he was distinguished for a somewhat rare, yet exceedingly desirable combination of qualities, which rendered him agreeable and instructive to all parties, gave him a peculiar ease and familiarity, and at the same time, a decision, energy, dignity, and solemnity, which are rarely found in the same person.

Children were always interested in him, and I think none would be disposed, as is sometimes the case, to shun his presence, for his manner and conversation were admirably fitted to place them at their ease, and secure their confidence. He possessed, for certainly he exhibited, a great amount of kind, social, benevolent feeling. His house was always a welcome home for clergymen, and for others who sought his aid and direction. I have said he was an old man, when I first became acquainted with him, but I would rather say, that, in a most important sense, he was never old. He certainly kept up with the spirit and enterprize of the age if he did not go before it, and kept himself thoroughly versed in relation to all questions of doctrine and practice, and adapted himself with great ease and propriety, to the occuring changes and exigencies. Thus by keeping up his acquaintance with these matters till the last, he was always a warm friend of younger brethren in the ministry, and was always regarded by them

Digitized by Google

as a father in affection and interest. Hence too, his services, after he had ceased to be the active pastor of his own church, were frequently sought, and highly prized by the neighboring churches. * * As a pastor, as far as I can judge, and I speak in part from what I have felt, he had few equals. It was my privilege, when a beloved wife was lingering under a fatal disease, through ten long months, to enjoy his frequent calls, and well do I recollect how much these visits were prized, not only by myself, but by her whose spirit was ripening and longing for heaven." On this subject also, Mr. Spaulding has said, "What a father and friend was he, in the house of mourning! how appropriate his addresses and sermons, how specific and well suited his prayers! and how sympathetic his heart in the sick room, and on funeral occasions."

There was much of tender earnestness in his addresses at the celebration of the Lord's supper, and in all things connected with the examinations for admissions to the church. He loved to dwell on those themes, that are peculiarly appropriate to the communion season; they were ever new to his taste, and sources of deep emotion, which he manifested in his addresses at such times.

A lady who united with his church quite early in life, thus writes on that subject: "Do you remember the day when we were examined for admission to the church, at the old meeting house? There was one little incident connected with it, which I shall ever remember. As my name was called, and I started tremblingly up the broad aisle with but little thought that I should be accepted, the pastor met me, and as he took my brief "experience" from my hand, said, with his kindest look and tone, "We love to see the lambs come." How assured I felt. It seemed as if the Good Shepherd was speaking to me through him. I always love to remember that I united with the church, when he was the only pastor."

Mr. Hill was in his person small, not much exceeding in stature five feet, but perfectly symmetrical in his limbs and

Digitized by Google

proportions, quick and active in his movements, of a cheerful temperament, frugal and temperate in his habits, industrious and economical in worldly affairs. He enjoyed through his long life, a remarkable degree of health and exemption from sickness and pain, having never been confined to his bed for the space of twenty four hours, until his last sickness, less than one week before his death. With small means, he brought up, in a respectable style, his numerous family, all of whom were trained to habits of industry and constant employment, to which they owe their success in life. He carefully and sedulously accustomed them all, in early life, to improve all leisure time in reading useful and instructive books, a taste and habit which they have great reason to thank him for implanting and cultivating at that early period. He never had the means to acquire an extensive library, but he had many rare and valuable books, among which were the works of William Perkins, of whom Fuller quaintly says, "He had a capacious head with angles winding, and roomy enough in which to lodge all controversial intricacies," of Owen and other puritan divines of the age of Cromwell, some of the works of Baxter, of Bishop Patrick, of John Newton, and of the pioneers of the New England churches, Richard Mather, Samuel Shepherd, John Wise of Ipswich, "the simple cobbler of Agawam," Increase and Cotton Mather, and Edwards. These, with the social library, a small but well-selected collection, which he was instrumental in forming about the year 1802, were his sole reliance in the way of literature. It is a question well worth propounding, which deserved best of their generation, those who collected the social library and for more than thirty years used it and preserved it in good condition, or those who sold and scattered it to the four winds of heaven. His literary taste was sound and correct. His style of writing, was plain and simple, free from ornament; the substance of his discourses was direct and practical.

Of the English poets, Milton, Pope, Young, and Cowper, were his favorite authors. But with him, the book of books

Digitized by Google

was the bible. To it, he always appealed. From it, all his illustrations and proofs were drawn. His habits of study were little methodical. The subject upon which he was to preach, would be thought over in his own mind during the week, but generally, he would not commence writing until Saturday. Then his discourses, both for forenoon and afternoon upon the same text, would be fully written out, but often not until late in the night of Saturday. When composing his discourses, he had the power of abstraction, in an unusual degree; so that when seated by the cheerful fire, of a Saturday evening, surrounded by his family, uninterrupted by their conversation or employments, he would pursue the train of thought induced by the subject selected, and follow it with a speedy pen, with as much regularity and composure as if in the recesses of the most retired study.

Although his public discourses were all carefully prepared and written out, he was by no means deficient in the power of ready and forcible extemporaneous discourse. This was often witnessed on funeral occasions, and in meetings for conference upon religious topics. On these last occasions, frequently taking a passage of scripture, sometimes a part, or the whole of a chapter, reading it verse by verse, he would accompany the reading with an extemporaneous commentary and explanation, which would be pertinent, apt and profitable to the hearers. Such meetings were his delight. He attended them constantly and regularly, till the physical and mental disability attendant on old age, deprived him of the power so to do. And, in the last years of his life, when his mental power was broken, and his mind was often wandering, he would many times on a winter's evening, when the household work was done, and his family, then reduced to a small number, were seated by the parlor fire, fancy himself in the conference room, and commence an exhortation in a quiet, low, indistinct tone of voice, and continue it for the space of half an hour or more; then having closed and dismissed his meeting, he would rouse up and remark that it had been a

Digitized by Google

very pleasant meeting, and enquire whether a goodly number had attended.

He was not fitted by nature, nor trained by habit to be a pioneer. He seldom sought out of his own accord, new paths. He was content to walk in the old and trodden ways, but still, he was always ready to welcome and further all new movements which he judged tended to the improvement and benefit of the human family. As such, he gave a ready and hearty welcome to the temperance movement, which has produced in many places, such immense good. The habit of using ardent spirits as a beverage, was universal in his early life, and until he had passed the meridian of life, he never thought it a duty to abstain, or that the indulgence of the habit was dangerous. The same was the case, with all the clergy of his day, and indeed of all the gentry, and it may be said of all the people. Some of the clergy of his acquaintance fell victims of this indulgence, and the wonder is, not that here and there one was swept away by the demon, but that all did not go down.

These warning examples produced no effect; but when the public mind was aroused to the consideration of this evil, he at once saw, as every man of sense must see, that the only safe rule, was total abstinence. He readily adopted it, and from that time to the close of his life, a period of some twenty-five or thirty years, strictly practiced total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors. He also abandoned the use of tobacco, to which he had been addicted from early life. He was ready to testify to the perfect safety of the immediate adoption of total abstinence in both cases, and to the happy effect of the reformation, whether regard be had to peace and comfort, either physically or mentally considered.

Another instance of the readiness with which he saw, and appreciated the importance of new movements, first brought forward by others, has already been stated on page 42, in regard to the introduction of a new system of sabbath school instruction.

Digitized by Google

In the sermon there referred to, he directed the attention of his people to the importance of the early education of children, in matters of religion, and in the knowledge of the scriptures, and urged them to new and more persevering efforts in that direction; and from that time, so long as he was able to take any part in this portion of christian duty, he devoted a large share of his time, to the sabbath schools; and he left among his papers, at his decease, manuscript questions carefully prepared by him for his own use, as a sabbath school teacher, embracing the whole circle of sabbath school instruction, usually undertaken in his parish. His last efforts as a religious teacher, were bestowed upon the children of his parish.

This summary of his life and character cannot be better concluded, than with the closing sentences of a notice of him, published soon after his death, in The Congregationalist. "In his later years especially, he was accustomed to spend several hours each day, in reading the Bible and in communion with his Savior. His humility was manifest, and also his love of the sanctuary. To him "Christ was all," and self was mortified and forgotten. His regard for his church was ever the same, he cherished for it an undeviating affection. Between him and his colleagues, there was perfect harmony. He never gave them the least trouble. The ruling purpose of his mind showed itself, amid all his infirmities. Often when he was unable to preserve the sequence of his thoughts on ordinary subjects, and when he scarcely knew whether it was morning or evening, he would offer prayer in a perfectly coherent manner, as if his family were gathered around him. The christian graces all seemed to be ripe in him, years before his exit, and he "came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season."

"Soldier of Christ well done,
Praise be thy new employ,
And while eternal ages run,
Rest in thy Savior's joy."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

at ye dedication of ye Meet house
Nov 26. 1795 — No 381

Psalm 84. 1. —

How amiable are they tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! —

The b. of G is evident from his wks - for ye invisible G of M from ye creation of ye O r clearly seen. b. being understood even his G power & godhead. and yt G is to b worshiped wth ye homage, is not only evident from his wd, but to be ye voice of nature - for yt nations. however ignorant & barbarous, agree in giving some kd of worship to M whom yy yt are maker & ruler of ye O - We wo yt are cast in a land of vision r highly favored in comparison wth others, - We not only have in our hands ye evidence of his b. conveyed by his wks, but kindly acquainted wth his church & dis - & r taught wt is ye acceptable service wth he req - and as it is ye duty of individuals to worship & bow down before ye Former of us, pray M yt grate r acc: of his favr & supplicate ye boys wth yy need, so do societies b. =y & upon M, it is manifestly yr duty to unite at some times for ye purpose of worshipg M wo rules in ye O, & has a right to yr services. - Yt is ye voice of reason. - and it is req in ye Rev wch he has made. It was enjoined upon his antient ppl. yt yy shd meet in a solemn Assy & hence ye Ps Hs. Enter into his gates wth th & his courts wth praise. & agreable to yt ye Apostle Heb. Hs ye Xns not to forsake ye assembling themselves together - wch Reason & Rev point

Digitized by Google

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE OLD MEETING HOUSE, IN MASON, NOVEMBER, 1837,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE REMOVAL BY THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY, OF THEIR PLACE OF WORSHIP, TO THE NEW MEETING HOUSE,

BY THE REV. EBENEZER HILL.

DEUT. XXXII. 7.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations.

WHEN Moses had conducted the children of Israel, God's chosen people from Egypt, through the great and terrible wilderness to the very borders of Canaan, and was informed that the time was just arrived, that he should leave them and be gathered to the great congregation of the dead, by divine direction he gathered the people together, and rehearsed in their ears the great things God had done for them, and put them in mind of their many provoking sins and acts of rebellion, and of the many judgments God brought on them and their fathers for their sins and provocations, and also, the great mercy of God in sparing them. And when he had written the history of the law to be deposited in the sacred ark, by the same divine command, he was led to compose a hymn or song, comprehending the important facts in their past history, likewise containing many predictions of future events. This was designed for them to commit to memory, and to be often rehearsed and sung, that so they might never forget them. Here we see how important it is, in the sight of God, that men should retain the knowledge of his mighty acts, and remember his mercies and his judgments. He

Digitized by Google

knew their liability to forget even the most remarkable and solemn scenes and events, and provided a help against this sinful infirmity, by having such facts as would excite the young to enquire about them, and keep the recollection of them ever fresh in their own memory, embodied in a popular, familiar song. This was the most effectual way of diffusing the knowledge, and preserving the memory of remarkable and solemn events which could be before the art of printing was discovered, and consequently when books would be scarce.

This is the only way in which unlettered nations can, or do preserve, any fragments of their history; even by embodying them in their songs, and thus handing them down from generation to generation. God not only took care thus to preserve the history of his church and his dealings with his people and their enemies, but also in the very same way inculcated the duty of charging the memory with these truths, and meditating on them much. Hence, whenever they repeated this song, they would of course repeat the command to "Remember the days of old, and consider the years of many generations." They are cautioned, that it is not enough for them to admit the facts related by their fathers, and treasure them up in their memory, but it is requisite, that they frequently call them up and cause them to pass before their minds, and make them subjects of deep thoughtfulness and meditation. From the words following the text, it is manifestly a duty to enquire after and seek to obtain knowledge of what God has wrought in ancient times and in later days. It is added to the text, "Ask thy Father and he will shew thee, your Elders and they will tell thee." It is a solemn and important duty of us all, to make ourselves acquainted with the history of the days of old, as far as we can, and that we frequently revolve in our minds the events of past generations. This was certainly the case with the children of Israel, and we should remember that God addresses us in the same language that he did them. "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations:" and ignorance or forgetfulness in us of the most

Digitized by Google

wonderful and remarkable events of very ancient or of more modern times, would be very inexcusable. For we have the bible, which will carry back the mind to the very beginning of time, and we have richly the means of obtaining knowledge of civil and ecclesiastical history, in this day and land of books and general education. This is required as a duty, not only in the text, but in many other places, in plain and positive language; and it is designed and calculated, as all other duties are, to promote our spiritual and moral edification, and comfort.

In further pursuing the subject, I shall call your attention,

1st. To some things we may see as included in the requisition, "Remember the days of old."

2d. To some of the advantages, which may result from the due remembrance and the contemplation of the days of old, and the years of many generations.

I. The remembrance of the days of old; things to be remembered and studied. Here I can name but few, and dwell upon none of them, as their importance requires. The things to be remembered and studied I name as included:

1st. The whole history of redemption, from the first intimation of mercy to fallen man, down to the full completion of the great work of redemption, by the actual sufferings of the divine Redeemer, and ascension of the Son of God.

Whatever other events may be correctly related, constantly remembered and carefully studied, if this be not in some measure remembered, and do not engage our solemn consideration, we shall only have the more splendid way down to eternal death. It would have been better for us, never to have had an existence, nor to have known what great things God has wrought for sinners, than for us to disregard the divine command, in this respect.

2d. Among the things included in the days of old, and to be remembered, we may see as included, the constant and unchangeable care which Christ has ever taken of his church, and the protection he has afforded to individual saints, and

Digitized by Google

the wonderful deliverances he has effected for them, in seasons of the greatest perils and sufferings. Often has the church been brought low, exceedingly low, and the enemies have thought that they had prevailed, but the Lord has brought deliverance, and given the triumph to his distressed people. And we should remember the instances of his faithfulness with individuals, when he has borne with them, and carried them through severest trials; though they have passed through the water, it has not overflowed them, and though they have passed through the fire, it has not consumed them.

Wonderful indeed have been many instances, where God has wrought for his saints, when all other hope was gone, and these are recorded that we may remember and meditate on them.

3d. Again, the many instances wherein God has brought sore judgments upon his church and people, and individual saints, for their sins, are to be remembered by us. They are recorded, that we may know them well, and be admonished; for examples, we have the histories of David, Hezekiah, and others.

4th. Again, the things to be remembered of old, are the remarkable judgments God has brought upon his enemies, and the enemies of his people; such, for instance, as upon Egypt, Pharaoh and his host, and upon Babylon. We may also, especially on this day, view as included among the things of old to be studied, the events of divine Providence in which we are directly or individually concerned, such as:

1st. The preparation of our forefathers to leave their native land, their pleasant dwellings and possessions, in order that they might have the gospel in its purity, and worship God according to the dictates of their consciences, and especially, in preparing an asylum for them in this land, so shortly before unknown to the old world. Here God planted his choice vine, and caused it to take root and bear fruit, once glorious fruit, however since degenerated. The kindness of the Lord to our forefathers, the deliverances he

Digitized by Google

wrought for them, when foes rose up against them, and the blessings he bestowed upon all their labors, until a little one had become a great nation; these are all of them, things of old, which are to be remembered, and which ought to be studied, until our hearts are filled with gratitude and praise.

2d. There are many things in the history of our own life, though it be short, and in the events which have led on to the circumstances in which we are placed this day. Our childhood and youth, our manhood and age, have not passed away, without many dispensations of Providence, which call for our continued remembrance, with deep feelings of gratitude, holy joy, and lively praise. The history of this town and of this church, with all the train of events, which have led to the circumstances in which we are placed this day, contains many things, which call for our lasting remembrance, and solemn meditation. In them, we may trace the leadings of divine Providence, and though on a smaller scale, yet more remarkable, because so much nearer to us.

II. I proceed to invite your attention to some of the advantages resulting from the continued remembrance, and due consideration of past events. And it is believed to be capable of proof, that historical facts, especially those which are contained in the bible and the late history of the church, teach us most conclusive lessons of wisdom, and the most solemn, remarkable, alarming, and profitable truths. If we remember and consider well, the whole history of redemption, we shall learn that there is, and can be but one possible way of escape for sinners, from the just, though tremendous wrath of God. The dispensations of God against the wicked, as well as his faithfulness and truth to those who fear his name and believe his promises, occur on every page. The first hope that sinful man could ever indulge, was grounded on the promises to the woman's seed; the display of divine anger against stubborn sinners, in the days of old, is sufficient to make those fear, who are not in the way in which sinners may come into the favor of God. O! what

Digitized by Google

proofs does the history of the world give of the prevalence of sin, and of its hatefulness to a holy God. If we look through the days of old, to the very morning of time, we see death reigning over all, in that all have sinned, for the wages of sin is death. In every view we take of the days of old, we see the evil of sin, and the dreadful consequences of apostasy from God. The whole history of redemption contained in the bible, when it is seriously contemplated, goes to teach the wicked world, that vain is the effort to prevail against, and overturn the church of God. How has God swept away whole and mighty nations, when they have risen up against his little flock! How solemn a call is this on sinners, to accept his mercy! We may learn some of the special benefits of remembering the days of old, and of acquaintance with ancient times, from many cases related in the bible; and the special benefit to be obtained thereby, is to be seen. Thus, is the church in a low, depressed, or oppressed state; are christians borne down with troubles, discouraged, and ready to faint; let them remember the days of old, &c., and they will find facts, which may strengthen their faith, and encourage their hope. Thus it was with the Psalmist, as related in the seventy-seventh Psalm. He had a season of darkness and sore trial, and was almost ready to despair of the mercy of God; but when he remembered the days of old, the years of ancient times, when he called to mind his song in the night, and on his having made diligent search, he was led to ask, will the Lord cast off forever? Can such a thing be? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Do his promises fail? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Such desponding, unbelieving thoughts had troubled him. But how did he check himself, and recover a tranquil state; yea, a state of holy joy, by calling to mind what God had done of old. His language is, "I said this in my infirmity," and instead of yielding to such despondency, he said, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High, I will remember the works of the

Digitized by Google

Lord, I will remember the wonders of old;" and we find him soon speaking the language of praise. This is the benefit that the people of God may derive, from remembering the days of old, when they are by any means brought low. Here they may take courage.

Again, when Moses would keep the people low in their own minds, and grateful to God for all his wonders of mercy and favor, he called upon them to "remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and a stretched out arm." If we would call to mind past events, and even go no further back than our own experience, we should remember our once totally ruined state, our state of slavery in sin, and how we owe all to divine mercy, if we are not now in worse than Egyptian bondage. If any thing in the world can humble us and hide pride from us, this would do it, and this is the great good received. And when he would bring them to deep repentance and continued humility, he charged them "remember and forget not, how ye provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness, from the day when ye departed out of the land of Egypt, until ye came into this place ye have been rebellious until this day." And when he would inspire them with courage to face their enemies and attempt arduous duties to which they thought themselves not able, he thus called upon them, "Thou shalt remember what the Lord did unto Pharaoh and unto all Egypt."

Such benefits may result to us from proper meditation, on the years of many generations gone by. And the more we acquaint ourselves with the history of this nation and the Church of Christ contained in it. And the more frequently we call to mind, and the more closely we meditate on the dealings of God; the more we shall find to humble us and bring us to repentance, to incite in us gratitude and a desire to make returns for unmerited kindness. And to these marvelous events we have not time to advert. Many circumstances conspire to call our attention to know what to some would

Digitized by Google

be things of many generations, things transacted long before their birth, and to some few, although they are things in which they had a personal share, they would seem of ancient times long since done. But entering immediately on the subject, I will call our attention to a few inferences; I shall barely name them and then leave them for our own reflections. The Old Testament, much despised by many, would be of exceeding value for the edification of all, and for the strengthening of their faith; not only is it very essential to their salvation, as well as the New Testament, but to their establishment in the hope of the gospel. Here only have we the history of the dealings of God with man and with his church for about four thousand years.

2d. We see the value of his preached word.

3d. Acquaintance with the history of God's dealing with the church and the world, with the history of former times, is of importance, as affording subjects for profitable meditation, at all times, to the exclusion of vain, foolish and impure thoughts.

This day is an epoch in the history of this town and church. This day, we leave this house, where we, and our fathers have worshiped for many years, and we may receive it as the voice of God to us. "Remember the days of old." Let us now together meditate on the events occurring in the days of our fathers, and trace them down to the present day, and we shall see much to humble us, and to shew us the many, and wonderful kindnesses of our God. I begin with some in the civil history of the town, such as I have been able to collect. The time of the first inhabitants moving into this town, was in the year 1752, and it was called township No. 1; and the first white child born in the town, would be, if living, more than eighty years of age. The first settlers in the town were many of them poor, and the settlement did not proceed so rapidly as in some other towns, nor was it until the year 1768, that an incorporation was sought and obtained. In that year, the inhabitants were incorporated a

Digitized by Google

body politic, and the place named Mason. This was in August; and in November following, when the first tax was levied, there were but seventy-six rated polls or persons, liable to be taxed. The original proprietors erected a meeting house, just by where this stands, for the inhabitants, before the town was incorporated; that is, they set up a frame, covered and enclosed it, but it never was finished. There it stood a shell until 1790. And in that your fathers, and some now living, worshiped, and even in the winter. In that house, I commenced my ministry in this place. Then, there was not a riding carriage in the town, and in the winter, whole families would come to meeting on a sled drawn by oxen, and the ladies were not ashamed to be seen in their plain, decent, *warm, comfortable, homemade clothing.* Were those times more unfavorable, or on the whole more uncomfortable, than the present, *judge ye.*

At length the town as a corporate body, agreed to build a house for the worship of God, but were not agreed as to its location. This was submitted to a committee of disinterested persons, and they *unhappily* selected this spot. I say unhappily, for had it been located where it should have been, it might have well continued many years longer as the place of our solemnities, and with small expense be made comfortable. When our fathers entered upon the work of building this house, it was with many discouragements and fears. They felt poor, and weak handed for such an undertaking; but God smiled upon them, and succored them far beyond their fears. They felt it to be a heavy burden, but they undertook it with cheerfulness, and were enabled to sustain it. And forty seven years ago this present month, the house was so far finished, that the ceremonies of my ordination were performed in it, which were the first public religious exercises in this house. It was soon after solemnly dedicated unto Almighty God, as a place for his worship, and through the rich goodness and mercy of God, very few sabbaths have passed from that time to the present, when the house has not been occupied by some

Digitized by Google

as a place of worship. And since that time the Lord has blessed his people, agreeably to his promises to his chosen people of old. He has increased their number and increased their wealth, proving that none are poorer for what they spend for God. In the year 1790, when this house was built, there were but about one hundred and ten dwelling houses in the town, poor and good, and now there are more than two hundred and ten, and our eyes are permitted to behold a new house completed, to be dedicated to God for the use of this church and the congregation worshiping with them. Surely we have cause this day to set up our Ebenezer, and say, hitherto hath the Lord helped us, and to give thanks at the remembrance of his merciful kindness, when we remember the days of old, and consider and think upon our present state as a society, for when we go out of this house we are not left houseless.

I will now add something relative to the changes that have taken place in the town, to be remembered among the things of the days of old. There is but one dwelling house and two barns now standing in all that can be considered as contained in this centre village, which were standing when I first came to this town, and but one building of any kind in all the west village, and there had never then been a resident physician, nor other professional man, except the short time Mr. Searle was the minister. Supposing five persons to a dwelling house, there would not at that time have been more than five hundred and fifty inhabitants, but they did probably some exceed six hundred. We have enjoyed at least a comfortable share of health with other places, and there have been many instances of longevity. But some years have been distinguished by great mortality. In the years 1818 and 1819, we were visited with that dreadful scourge angina maligna or throat distemper, and it swept away many of the children. In the year 1818 was the greatest number of deaths that ever were in the town in one year; there were thirty four; of these twenty two were children under fourteen years of age, and of these

Digitized by Google

twelve died of throat distemper. In 1819, there were thirty one deaths, and of these eighteen were under fourteen years of age, and twelve of them were removed by the same malignant distemper.

In the space of forty-seven years, there have been removed from this place to the narrow house prepared for all the living, somewhat rising eight hundred. What a large congregation! How often have all the now living, been warned to prepare for death and the judgment.

But it is time to call to mind the years of many generations, respecting the church in this place. Previous to my acquaintance with this church, it had been in a state of perplexity and trouble, for most of the time of its existence as a church. Among the earliest settlers in the town, were some professors, but no church was constituted until 1772, four years after the town was incorporated. When the church was embodied, it was stated to be a *Calvinistic* church, and the articles of faith to agree essentially, with the Westminster confession of faith. At this time Rev. Jonathan Searle was ordained, and constituted the pastor of this church. Shortly after, unhappy difficulties arose between the pastor and the flock, which caused his dismissal, nine years after his settlement. Soon after, or from the time of this event, he ceased to preach. He was appointed a civil magistrate, officiated in that capacity, and remained in the town until his death. During the nine years of his ministry, fourteen were admitted by profession, and nine by letter, and eleven owned the covenant, so called, according to the practice of most of the churches in N. England, in those days. After that period, until the time of my ordination, I find record of admission of *one* member only. There was a long time of deathlike sleep in the church, until about the year 1785, when it pleased God to pour out his spirit, and cause a great revival of religion in his people, and of his work in converting sinners, in New Ipswich, under the ministry of the venerable Mr. Farrar, and soon it extended, in some measure, to this and other

Digitized by Google

towns. This part of the vineyard, although in a very deplorable state, was not wholly passed by; some few christians were awakened, and brought to submit themselves to their long neglected duty.

Many of the people of Mason, especially of the young, flocked to the solemn meetings at New Ipswich, and were struck with wonder, and soon some were convicted of sin, and became anxious for their soul's salvation, and shortly after were rejoicing in the hope of pardoning mercy. But such was the state of the church in Mason, destitute of a minister, broken, dispirited, that the new converts sought to unite with the church in New Ipswich, to which they had become greatly attached, by their acquaintance with the members, which the situation and intercourse had brought about, and by that mutual love, which new born souls who have mourned, and wept, and rejoiced together, feel. Their request was granted, on condition that they removed their relation, whenever the church in Mason should become settled. One happy effect of this revival, was a determination in the church and congregation, to seek the settlement of a gospel minister; and, in the very mysterious providence of God, the present speaker was elected to this office, and is continued to this day.

Just before my ordination, those who were residing in town, members of other churches, and these members of the New Ipswich church, removed their relation to this church. The church consisted of thirty-six members when I settled with them, and has now rising one hundred and fifty-seven, in this town, in regular standing. The whole number added, during my ministry, is two hundred and eighty-one; of these, two hundred and sixty-one by profession. A small number indeed compared to the number of inhabitants, and length of time, although we have been favored with some precious seasons of refreshing, from the presence of the Lord, seasons when the Holy Spirit has come down with power, and wrought wonders, making the word of God powerful, and causing joy

Digitized by Google

and gladness on earth and in heaven, over penitent sinners. It will be doubtless refreshing to some, to be reminded of those years, in which they rejoiced when first they knew the Lord, or rejoiced when salvation came to their house, and their dear friends became dearer to their hearts, by being united to the family of God.

The years 1801 and 1802 were indeed years of the right hand of God. After a long season in which but few, and at distant intervals, were persuaded to embrace the Savior, God was pleased to grant such a refreshing season, as never had before been experienced in this place, and the fruit that was gathered, was an addition of fifty-four members by profession. The number that united with the Baptist church, I cannot tell. It seemed then, as if it could not be, that there should be such a lowering down as would be like night after a bright and glorious day. But oh! what wonderful changes we have witnessed, which should humble our souls, while we rejoice in the goodness of God, that after his spirit has been grieved away, and his people gone away backward, he should remember them in mercy. Again, in the year 1812, was a short season of the special display of the mercy of God, and twenty-five were added to the church. After this, only now and then a mercy drop was found to fall, until the year 1826, which was a year more distinguished than any other in the annals of this church. God wrought gloriously, every part of the town was visited, and so manifest was the work of God, that for a time, all opposition seemed to be silenced, and the fruit of this glorious revival, was an addition to this church, of sixty-two members. Oh! that we may soon see such another day of the mercy and goodness of God. As the fruits of this revival, there were added to the church in 1826 and in 1827, seventy-nine members; in 1831, twenty-one, and in 1834 and 1835, thirty-two. Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations, and think what changes will shortly take place here.

When I look around on this assembly, I can see but one of

Digitized by Google

the number of those, who from this town joined the church in New Ipswich, and removed their relation at the time of my settlement. Then they were young, but where are they? I can see but two [Jonathan Batchelder, and the widow Polly Dunster] of all the thirty-six, which composed the church in that solemn hour, when I was constituted their pastor. Where are they? Some have removed to other churches, and perhaps remain on earth, but most of them have fallen asleep. Oh! how near at hand, should this view bring the time of our own departure; how excite us to be up and doing, while it is day. It is matter of rejoicing certainly to me, that when we leave this house, we have a place of worship to which we may repair, and that, although I minister no longer in this house, or any other, I do not leave you as sheep without a shepherd.

Where will be the present inhabitants of this town, after the revolution of such another period as we have contemplated. Certainly, with many, the places that now know them, shall know them no more. Some few may remain on earth, monuments of God's sparing mercy and goodness. It is hoped, that many will be shouting the praises of redeeming love in heaven; and oh! distressing thought! it is feared that some will be wailing their folly and madness, in eternal despair. What changes may be expected to take place, in half a century to come, in this church and congregation, and the inhabitants of this town. The farms we now cultivate with so much care, will have passed into other hands. The houses we now inhabit, will not be inhabited by us then. This house, which has been consecrated to God, for his service, and the place where he has displayed his mercy, will then be mouldered into ruins.

The house to which we are about to remove will become old, and the religious assembly will be another generation; while we shall probably all be sleeping in dust. Yes, that communion table will be surrounded with other members, unless God in his wrath shall remove his candlestick. Not

Digitized by Google

only will these seats be vacated by this assembly, not only will the present communicants cease from coming to this table, not only will these walls cease to resound with the voice of praise from the lips of this assembly, but the house in which we are to worship after this day, will be filled with other worshipers than those who may have the privilege to unite with us in the first religious exercises in that earthly temple. In thirty years another generation will occupy our present places.

It is right that as we leave this house, we should leave it under the impression of such remarkable truths. I cannot however, say farewell to this house, before once more calling on christian brethren and sisters, to remember the time is short, and to do with their might what they have to do; think not your work is done because you leave this house of worship. Keep in grateful remembrance the works of God. Take courage from his precious promises and his dealings with his people, in the years that are gone, be instant in season and out of season. Cease not to plead with God, for the outpouring of his spirit upon this church and congregation. Let your light so shine, that others seeing your good works, may come and put their trust in that God and Saviour you love and adore. Oh! sinners, this is the last message to you from this place, you can have but little time left, the door of mercy is now open; O! fly to the Saviour, who stands with open arms to receive you, while it is yet an accepted time, and a day of salvation.

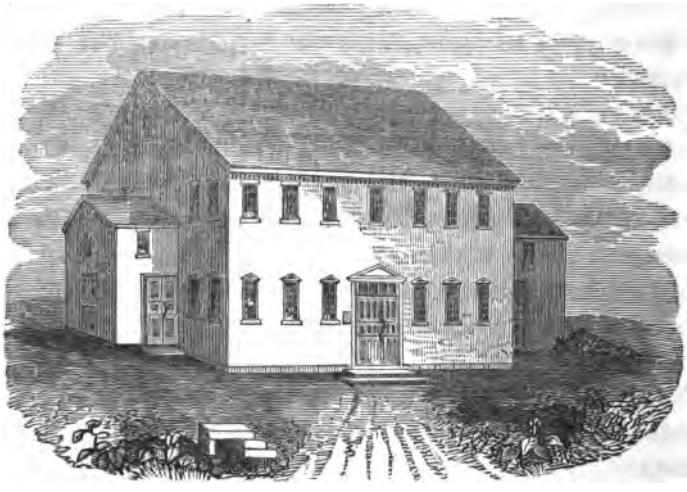
I now bid farewell in my own name, and in the name of this church and congregation, to this house as a place of worship, as the place of our solemn assemblies.

FAREWELL TO THIS PULPIT: to me indeed, for many years, the dearest spot on earth. And although I expect not to labor any more in this pulpit, if I do in any other, I never shall think of this place, and remember the days of old, without such associations as will be calculated to move the feelings of humility and gratitude.

Digitized by Google

FAREWELL TO THIS HOUSE, which has been the place, in which we have witnessed many painful and joyous scenes.

O! may these walls, once consecrated to God, never be *desecrated* or *polluted*, by being made the place where infidelity or error shall be disseminated; or the spirit of party, manage to subvert the freedom of this favored land.



OLD MEETING HOUSE. FIRST OCCUPIED NOVEMBER 8, 1790.

NEW MEETING HOUSE. FIRST OCCUPIED NOVEMBER, 1837.

Digitized by Google

A FUNERAL SERMON,

DELIVERED AT MASON, N. H., ON LORD'S DAY,

DECEMBER 10, 1826,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

CAPTAIN HIRAM SMITH,

Who Deceased December 6, 1826, Aged 25 Years.

BY REV. EBENEZER HILL.

JOB XXI. 23, 24, 25, 26.

One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them.

ONE interesting point of instruction conveyed in these words of the aged, experienced, and afflicted Job, is manifestly this. The grave may be very near to the most prosperous, and healthy, and strong, as well as to those who endure the greatest afflictions, and most severe sufferings. I shall endeavor, briefly, to establish this truth, in order to exhibit some of the important instructions which the great uncertainty of life seems forcibly to convey to us all; and to prepare the way for such application and addresses as the solemn scene which so lately passed before our eyes, together with others of no long date, seem to require.

Job was a man of very eminent piety. It appears from divine testimony, that he exceeded all the men on earth in his day, in devotedness to God, and in labor after inward

Digitized by Google

purity, and practical holiness. "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" Job was a wise man; a man of good understanding; a man of much and careful observation. It is evident he was well acquainted with the history of preceding ages, so far as this was handed down by tradition; and he had attentively observed the dispensations of Divine Providence in his own day. The remark in the text was the result of his own observation, confirmed by the testimony of the fathers, who had lived long before him. And the same truth has been gaining additional evidence in every age of the world since, down to the present day. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk and his bones are moistened with marrow. And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure. They shall lie down in the dust, and the worms shall cover them."

This truth also comes to us with authority; being written by the pen of inspiration, preserved by the providence of God, and making a part of the holy scriptures. O let us feel our personal interest in this solemn truth! As we know that it is appointed to all men once to die; as we know that we are of the dust, and must return to dust again; so we are taught in the text, that we are not sure of any long previous warning of the time of our dissolution. No circumstances in life can give any security that death is not at the door.

If to be full of strength, and free from any disease, the blood and spirits flowing with life and vigor, can give no security for the continuance of life; then surely no attachments to life, no worldly circumstances, no pleasing prospects, no connections formed, no engagements made, can give the least assurance that the grave is not just before us. How often do we see this melancholy truth demonstrated! We do not need to repair to the chronicles of ancient times for evidence that the young, even children, and the sprightly youths of fairest

Digitized by Google

promise, may suddenly drop into an untimely grave. Neither need we go far for proof that the young, the strong and vigorous—their parents' hope, their parents' joy, while in the full enjoyment of health,—their warm and lively imaginations painting bright prospects before them, which seem to them certain; perhaps forming connections, which they fondly believe will be lasting, and on which they ground the warmest expectations of happiness—we need not, I say, go far for proof, that such may, in an unexpected hour, fall into the cold embrace of death.

Parents, while they feel not, or scarcely begin to feel any of the decays of nature; while their nerves are strong, and their bodily organs are able to perform their functions with ease, and they behold with joy, their children like olive plants around their tables, or settling in the world with hopeful prospects—no sickness, no apparent messenger of death alarms them—*they* may drop and die in the fulness of their strength; or their children may fall before their eyes. In either case, how unlooked for, how surprising the change! Circumstances in life give no more security against death, than health. Death spares the rich no more than the poor. Engagements, of whatever kind, are unavailing to protect against death. We may have much upon our hands to do, much unfinished business, according to our promises to others, or plans which we have laid out for ourselves; but as our full strength will not be able to withstand, so our engagements and promises will not move death to delay his stroke, when commissioned to strike. And oftentimes there is little or no warning given, by any previous indisposition, before the strong man is made to bow. One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, as well as another at whose door death had seemed to knock, by long continued, or frequent sicknesses.

Death, in unnumbered forms, stalks in every path we tread. The grave is ever before us, and we are constantly approaching it; and no one can say that the next step is not into it.

Digitized by Google

As David said of himself, so it may be with us, "There is but a step between me and death." The prophet was directed to cry, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth and the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. Surely the people is grass." Job also, guided by the Holy Spirit, hath said, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Surely then no one may consistently boast himself of to-morrow. However firm his health now is, he may then be in his grave.

It is not my intention to labor to prove a truth so evident in frequent occurrences. I have barely reminded you, my fellow-mortals, of what we all admit, I trust, and what every one must admit, who receives testimony of God, or only casts his eye over a little space around him; and I have done it for this purpose, that our minds might be prepared to receive the instruction which such facts press upon all the living.

You will suffer me to state, and, I beseech all duly to weigh, some consequences which must follow from the foregoing acknowledged facts. And,

1. If then in the midst of life we are in death; if, in the fullness of our strength, and in our brightest worldly prospects, we are liable every moment to be cut down by death, and in the grave to be hidden from the world and all it contains; to have all our connections dissolved, and to leave all our earthly enjoyments behind us forever; then, certainly, they are miserably poor who have no better interest than what this world affords; nor enjoyments superior to all those of time and sense. Though they be now free from suffering pain, in full health and strength; though placed in the most easy and flattering circumstances, and having the brightest earthly prospects before them, they are poor indeed! We may feel ourselves to-day to be full and happy in our wealth and friends; but if these be all we have, in one short hour

Digitized by Google

we may have nothing. Is not vanity inscribed on all this world, when immortal beings seek their happiness in it; and neither the most vigorous health, nor the greatest abundance, nor the most endeared connections and friends, can save us a moment from death; and as soon as death passes upon us we must leave the world as naked as we came into it! O, if we have not a better inheritance, richer enjoyments, and more glorious prospects than all this world can afford, we are in an unenviable, in a most pitiable state.

2. A correct view of the uncertainty of life, the certainty of death, and the change produced by death, shews the inestimable value of Religion.

It is only religion, personal religion, which consists in conformity of heart to the character and government of God, and the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ, that can reconcile the mind to leave the world, support it in the near view of death, and render the soul happy after death. O then, of what incalculable worth is religion; since we all must die, leave kindred and friends, and possessions behind us, and launch into the eternal world. Nothing but that glorious hope which springs from feeling reconciliation to God, trust in Christ's atoning blood for the pardon of sin, and belief in the promise of his favor forever, can enable us to view the world receding, and the constant, near and certain approach of death, without dismay. And it is only evidence that they possessed this religion, which can give us consoling hopes, and comfort our hearts, concerning those who were dear to us, but are hidden from our eyes in the cold grave. It is this religion only which fits the soul for heaven. Who then can conceive, much less express the danger of every soul, destitute of religion, and thus unprepared to die. For no one knows the day of his death; and there is no change of moral character after death. There is no work, nor devise, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave; yet the soul must exist forever, and in a state to be decided according to the character formed, and the deeds done in the body: Who then can

Digitized by Google

rest without evidence of a heart by grace subdued to the will and service of God? without evidence of vital union to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior of sinners? Surely to know Jesus Christ, and him crucified; to know him as the Savior in whom we trust, whom we love, and whom we serve, must be that wisdom which is thus described by the king of Israel, "Wisdom is more precious than rubies; her merchandise is better than the merchandise of silver; and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and happy is every one that retaineth her." O, who can dare, in this dying world, to believe his own immortality, and not seek this treasure!

3. The view which has been presented, of the close connection between us and death, between every thing here and the grave, should teach us to live habitually as strangers and travelers in this dying world, and not to set our affections on things below. Surely our hearts ought to sit very loose to all things we hold by such an uncertain tenure as life. And to make anything which is purely of this world, our confidence, our hope, our idol, is not only *exceedingly criminal* but *exceedingly absurd.* Why should we cleave so fast to that which we may so soon be called to leave forever? O if the case be with us as has been represented, how careful should we be not to suffer any inferior attachment to hinder us in seeking the present enjoyment of God, and laboring to secure an heirship to the glories of his heavenly kingdom.

In attempting an application of the subject to the assembly at large, the few aged people present will permit me to offer a word directly to them in the first place.

Is it true, my aged friends, that some die in youth, yea, die in their full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet? Have you walked so many years on earth, that but few of all your youthful acquaintances are left? then, while you well may wonder that you are alive this day, you may know that the time of your departure is at hand. Although you have been wonderfully spared, you have not obtained a discharge from

Digitized by Google

the warfare. You must meet the king of terrors. Are you prepared *now* to meet death? Are you prepared to stand in the presence of the holy God? If any of you have lived to this day without returning to God by unfeigned repentance, and by faith in Jesus Christ, not only death, but everlasting destruction is before you. The sparing mercy of God, if you have rejected, and continue to reject his grace, offered in the gospel, will only aggravate your condemnation. O then, while a few more sands may run, and you are continued prisoners of hope, turn to the strong hold. If any of you, aged friends, have a comforting evidence that you are prepared, through grace, for a peaceful death, see that ye be as servants who watch and wait for the coming of their Lord at an unknown hour.

From the aged, I turn to call upon the middle aged, and young people. I ask you, dear friends, to consider, in view of the subject, and the occasion of it, and let your own understanding answer the following questions. Is it possible that you can have any business, or concerns of so much immediate importance as the immediate care of your souls? Is there any thing you cannot neglect with more propriety, and less hazard than preparation for death? Can you believe that you may die in the fulness of your strength, and yet dare to live to another day without seeking God! Can any of you dare, not to attempt now to do what you must wish you had done, but it may be too late to do, when you feel the cold hand of death?

But it is expected that some particular address will be made to the mourners; made mourners indeed, by the affecting instance of mortality which has been publicly mentioned this day; and for whom, I trust, many have earnestly prayed, that they may be sanctified, and supported, and comforted, under their heavy trial.

To the dear friend of the deceased we first look, and with no ordinary feelings of sympathetic grief. How has this truth, thus painfully realized, "one dieth in his full strength,"

Digitized by Google

struck a death blow to your pleasing earthly prospects; perhaps fond dreams of years to enjoy the society of a beloved friend; and that ye might go down the vale of years together. Perhaps you were anticipating much worldly comfort and respect, by your mutual efforts, and mutual kindness. Perhaps hoping that you might be helpers of each other's joy in a wearisome journey to a brighter world. Death has stepped in, and the bright visions have disappeared. Your friend is gone! But while the scene through which you have passed, is heart affecting, and long must be, it is instructing; for it is the voice of God. He does not forbid you to mourn; and no one may; but He calls you to take up the cross, to humble yourself under his mighty hand, to bear the yoke of trouble in your youth; and you have the prayers of many that you may find it good for you.

I say, the scene through which you have passed, is instructing. You cannot easily be taught, and more impressively, the uncertainty of life, and the importance of being prepared for death, at an unwarned hour. You cannot have set before you, more feelingly, the uncertainty of all earthly prospects. But are you comfortless? O there is a source of consolation always open for the afflicted. God reigns. The heavenly Father reigns. He who afflicts calls the afflicted to seek him early in their afflictions. We hope you know the way to the mercy-seat through a crucified Savior. Draw near in humble boldness in his name, and he who has laid this burthen on you will support you. O let the loss of an earthly friend render the *Friend of sinners* more precious to your heart. Let the disappointments in human calculations raise your heart above the world, and lead you to seek divine consolations, and press forward towards the mark for the prize of the high calling, and you will find lasting benefit from the scenes, which for the present are so grievous. If Christ be indeed the friend of your heart, he will never leave nor forsake you. And you may look forward to a sudden death and an early grave with composure; or quietly wait all the days of your appointed

Digitized by Google

time, till your change shall come, even though you continually bear a cross.

To the bereaved parents all our eyes turn, and our hearts move with tenderness.

God has been very gracious to you, in bestowing an uncommon share of health in your family. Your children have all been spared to grow up to manhood; and the voice of health has been heard almost constantly in your habitation. Now grievous sickness and death have entered your home. The breach is made. A beloved son is taken away in the fulness of his strength; and while your hopes and fond expectations were rising, and his prospects brightening. How suddenly, how unlooked for, has your trouble come! But you will remember, mourning friends, "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." You will eye the hand of God, which has touched you in this event; and O listen to his voice. It is, *Prepare suddenly to exchange time for eternity.* You see a breach made in your family, which is a sure presage that all the rest must go, and that you must follow, or precede them. You see that you are not sure of wearing out with old age, or that you shall have long warning of the approach of death. Healthy, promising, children are apt to be their parents' hope in their declining years: but you are now feelingly admonished not to lean on such props. O let the Lord be your confidence, and then, though all earthly props sink under you, you will be supported and comforted; for in every affliction you may repair to him, and he will be found a present help. Your age admonishes you that your time must be short; but what scenes of trouble, what sore disappointments are first to be endured, you do not, and cannot know. You are to look for troubles in this world. May you be favored with the teachings of the Holy Spirit, and make a wise improvement of this affliction, and be prepared for what is to come. We wish you divine consolation. God has inflicted the wound, and He alone can heal. You may lose the sensible and pun-

Digitized by Google

gent feeling of your trouble; time will render the remembrance less painful; but it is only God who can heal the wound, and repair the breach.

What can I now say to the brethren and sisters of the deceased? what need I say? The voice of God speaks to you loudly, and most intelligibly. A beloved brother has fallen in the prime of life, in the fulness of his strength. Your health, your strength, your prime of life, can no more secure you against the arrest of death. Dear friends, be entreated to listen to the voice of Providence, which calls you to attend to the concerns of your souls, without delay. And, O, listen to the dying request of your brother. Did you witness his anxiety for his own soul, and for your souls? Did you hear his warning, supplicating voice, while his reason lasted, urging you to seek religion; to become reconciled to God without delay? Did you hear him reprobate the sentiment he had labored to believe, and warn you against it? Did you hear him declare his full conviction of his own just condemnation as a sinner; and that the only hope of escaping everlasting death was through the atoning blood of Christ, even by faith in him? O, then, rely upon it, the time will come when the favor of God, peace in the soul, and hope like an anchor, sure and steadfast, will be found, *by you*, to be of more value than the whole world, and all the fulness thereof. When shall this be sought? You may die suddenly, in the fulness of your strength. You may be deprived of reason before the close of life; and then nothing can be done to prepare for death. It is certain *you must* die, the time is unknown; and when death has his commission to strike, he is inexorable. O then let not the plea be made in vain, acquaint *now* yourselves with GOD, and be at peace with him, that good may come to your souls.

On this solemn occasion the officers and soldiers composing the Militia Company of which the late HIRAM SMITH was Captain, have a right to be particularly noticed in this address; for they are specially afflicted in this mournful event of

Digitized by Google

Divine Providence; for they are, indeed, mourners, as their appearance at his funeral, and on this holy day, clearly manifests.

How affecting, how alarming have been the calls of Providence to this Company! In the short space of one year and a half, two Captains, young and active, have been cut down, not by the sword of battle, but by that foe with whom each one, officer and soldier, must contend in single combat, and before whom each one must fall.

You, respected officers and soldiers, notwithstanding the military parade you make, live in a time of profound peace in your country. There are no apparent indications that you may soon be called to active service. Why then all this military parade? Why all these pains to learn the discipline and art of war? O, methinks I hear you say, "It is the dictate of wisdom, in peace to prepare for war. It is uncertain how soon we may be called to defend by force and arms, our dearest rights, and jeopardize our lives in the high field of battle; and what then, if found unacquainted with the art of war, wholly unprepared, undisciplined, unarmed?" Forcible reasoning! O let it apply with all its aptness, with all its force, in another case. Here I may address you as fellow soldiers, although I am unacquainted with all your military manœuvres. Before *us* is a war in which there is no discharge; no engagements, nor attachments, nor fears, can be an excuse. Here, is it not equally the dictate of wisdom, *In peace prepare for war?* that we should arm ourselves with that armor which will not fail in the day of battle; acquaint ourselves with the holy discipline, and become expert in the use of those arms? When called to combat with the common enemy, death, and all the innumerable foes of our souls' salvation, it is only when clad in the whole armor of God, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, and the breast-plate of righteousness, that we can come off conquerors and more than conquerors. Thus armed and disciplined, we shall be crowned with victory,

Digitized by Google

although the enemy shall seem to triumph. You now, fellow men, appear as soldiers. But are you soldiers of the cross? are you marching in the ranks of the great Captain of salvation, and obeying his orders? Then may you proceed boldly. But whatever leader you may follow, when you fall as you must, you fall to rise no more.

Hence, whenever you meet on military occasions, your very manœuvres are calculated to remind you of interesting truths, and to convey to you important instruction. And it seems strange that in a christian land, military meetings are not generally solemn meetings. Every word of command given, every manœuvre performed, every step marched to the music should remind you of the necessity of preparation for the great conflict, and of the danger of being untrained to the holy war. Can *this Company* meet again and trifle with the art of war? Can a training be a season of rude merriment after this? Can the soldiers, who see their officers fall before them, feel safe, until they have enlisted under the great Captain of salvation, Jesus Christ, the same forever? This day you see, you have painful evidence, that the art of war cannot defend from death. No more can any other arts or devices. Your Captain was esteemed a good officer; but he has fallen. Death did not respect *him:* no more will he respect *you.* Soldiers may inconsiderately brave death in the field of battle; but it is only the christian soldier who has true courage in the hour of danger, and can contemplate the constant approach of death without dismay. It is not courage, it is dreadful hardiness to jeopardize life fearlessly without the prevailing hope of a happy eternity.

Soldiers, you acknowledge Captain SMITH was a good officer. But you may rely upon it, for I had it from his own lips, he felt the worth of his immortal soul; he acknowledged himself justly condemned as a sinner; with lively emotions he mourned his past neglects; and he was anxious for the salvation that is in Christ. Now will you not be anxious for salvation? can concern for the soul be unbecoming a soldier?

Digitized by Google

To you, the surviving officers in this Company, this day must be a solemn day. Who can be the successor to your late Captain, and look back one year and a half, and not tremble? Who can rise to a higher grade and not tremble? But why speak of this? Each one, whether he rise in rank or not, must bow to the king of terrors, and go to that world from which there is no return. Who, which of you, is prepared to follow next? whose turn will it be next? This is a question no man can answer. One in his full strength as likely as one who is diseased and feeble. O then, let me affectionately entreat you, and not entreat in vain, to take care of your souls. Now give yourselves to Christ. Delay no longer. Receive him as your commander; rely on his righteousness; believe and obey his word. Then, and not till then, may you live in peace, die in peace, and be crowned with victory.

Digitized by Google

THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF MASON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE LYCEUM

IN MASON VILLAGE.

BY REV. EBENEZER HILL.

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Rev. Ebenezer Hill,

Dear Sir:—We, whose names are here subscribed, were appointed a committee, to request a copy for publication, of your recent instructive and interesting discourse upon the early history of Mason, delivered before the Mason Village Lyceum. Desirous of preserving the history of the past, and admonished by your advanced age, that we cannot long hope to enjoy your society, we trust you will comply with our request.

Yours truly,

GEORGE ELLIOT,
THOMAS H. MARSHALL,
D. F. RICHARDSON.

Mason Village, February 24, 1846.

To George Elliot, Esq., Dr. Thomas H. Marshall, and Rev. D. F. Richardson,

Gentlemen:—The request of the Lyceum, made through you, of a copy of the Lectures on the History of the Town, delivered last winter, I cannot refuse. Yet I am constrained to appreciate the request, rather as a mark of respect to old age, than as an evidence of merit in the performance.

Various hindrances have caused delay in examining facts, and in transcribing and preparing the copy. Such as it is, I cheerfully present it to you, and through you, Gentlemen, to the members of the Lyceum, with many warm wishes for the spiritual and temporal prosperity of the risen and rising generation.

Very respectfully your friend and humble servant,

EBENEZER HILL.

Mason, May 1, 1846.

Digitized by Google

LECTURE.

Most people take pleasure in reading history, and learning the events of ancient days. But when the history relates to scenes in which their immediate ancestors were concerned—to events which have a bearing on their own state and condition, the interest deepens as they proceed.

Who will not find entertainment and profit in reading the history of England from its earliest period? But as the time approaches when our forefathers were forced to leave their pleasant dwellings and their beloved country, and seek an asylum in a newly discovered continent, where they might enjoy civil and religious liberty, what man of common sensibility—certainly, what true American, is not moved more and more? And is there even a scholar in our common schools, who can read the landing of the pilgrims on the rock in Plymouth, and the severe sufferings they had to endure, and the labors they had to perform, without feeling his heart beat quick within him? But history, whether civil, ecclesiastical, or biographical, not only affords entertainment, but in a pleasing manner valuable instruction. Nor is it necessary that the history should abound in marvelous and wonder-stirring events, to render it pleasant and profitable.

Entertaining these views, I am led to believe that the history of Mason may be thus useful to the present inhabitants of the town, and especially to the young people; and in compliance with a special request, I now attempt to present such

Digitized by Google

facts relative to this town, and its early inhabitants, as I have been able to collect, from records which have come into my hands, and from conversation had with old people, almost all of whom are now—as we must shortly be—in the grave.

The land included in this town is part of a grant made to Captain John Mason, of London, by the king of England, and it appears from records that certain persons bought of John Tufton Mason, heir of John Mason, a tract of his said grant in New Hampshire, containing about 77 square miles, of which tract this town is a part.

At a meeting of these proprietors by purchase of Mason, held at Portsmouth, Joseph Blanchard, of Dunstable, was accredited their agent; and as such, in their name, by deed or charter, conveyed to a company, whose names are expressed in the instrument, a certain tract of land five miles square, which was the dimension and shape of this town in its original grant: but afterwards a strip of land containing 200 acres was taken from No. 2, now Wilton, and annexed to No. 1, so called; also when the Province line was run between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, a gore of land was cut off from Townsend, and annexed to Mason; so that it was no longer square, but wider from North to South than from East to West. The charter or deed was executed June 16, 1749; and the names of thirty-four men are inserted in the instrument as grantees; most of whom, as far as I can judge by the names and other circumstances, were from the towns of Dunstable, Hollis, Groton, Pepperell and Townsend. This township, thus obtained, was designated No. 1, in the Province of New Hampshire, north or back of Townsend.

In the charter were certain reservations, which shew the regard, both grantors and grantees had for the education of the youth, and the moral and religious instruction of all, as well as for the comfort of the early settlers. For instance, two lots of land were reserved for encouragement to build mills; six acres were reserved for a common, wherever the meeting house should be located. Three shares were

Digitized by Google

reserved for other uses, viz: One share to the first settled minister; one share for the ministry from generation to generation.* This right has been disposed of, and I say *happily* disposed of, (notwithstanding the good intentions of the grantors, and perhaps the illegality of the act,) for in this day it is not a bone of contention. A third share was reserved for the support of schools; and it is a matter of *regret* that this also is disposed of.

There were not only reservations, but also conditions in the charter. The first condition was that a meeting house should be built by the grantees, for the use of the inhabitants; and built as near the centre, as by the grantees should be judged most convenient. The time for this to be done was limited to May, 1753. Such a house within about three rods north east of the now Old Meeting House, was erected, enclosed and covered, and little more ever done to it. Thus, it remained the place of worship, until after what is now called the Old Meeting House in the centre was occupied.†

Another condition in the charter was, that on some lot in each share, three acres should be cleared, enclosed, and fitted for mowing or tillage in two years from the date; and on each should be a house at least sixteen feet square, and seven feet or more studded, with a chimney and cellar, fitted for a dwelling, and some person or family inhabit it, before the last of May, 1752; and residence be continued until May, 1755.

The settlement of the town advanced slowly. Yet it appears from the report of a committee, appointed to ascertain who had *not* performed their duty, that in three years after the grant, twenty-three settlements had been begun—few had more than eight acres cleared, and the greatest clearing was twenty acres. Two good houses, one barn and

* Supposed to be three lots.

† This house was afterwards torn down; and at the time the following incident took place. When the frame was all down except the four posts confined by the gallery sills, Amos Dakin was standing on one of these sills, when the remainder of the frame swayed and fell. He kept his place until almost to the ground, and then leaped and fell flat; the timber just passed over him, and he received no injury.

Digitized by Google

a young orchard were reported. What kind of houses, the first were, may be gathered from this circumstance, that Mr. Obadiah Parker's house was the first framed house in the town, perhaps the only one, at that time,* and only two were called good. From which we may conclude that twenty-one out of the twenty-three were made of round logs, or at best with square timber; but one of these log houses remains to this day.†

When the settlements were very few, instead of being compact, as might have been expected from the social nature of man, they were scattered to almost every part of the town. Enosh Lawrence, whose axe was first heard to resound in our forests, was from Pepperell, and began his settlement in the south part of the town, where Ephraim Hildreth now lives. His wife was the first white woman in the town, and lived to old age. Nathan Hall, known here as Deacon Hall, also from Pepperell, began next to Mr. Lawrence, and settled in the north part, where Joseph Saunders now lives. Obadiah Parker located himself on the west side of the town. There were only three women in the town, when Mrs. Parker left her relatives and friends in Chelmsford, to accompany her husband into this wilderness, which was then considered as almost *the far West.* Thomas Tarbell settled in the east, where some of his descendants now live, and a Mr. Powers located in the extreme east. For a time the only place that appeared like a neighborhood was on the hill, where deacon Hall settled. Soon after him Henry Jefts began where Jonathan Batchelder lives; Nathan Fish where Ira Hall lately lived, and one Samuel Tarbell where Luther Nutting lives.

The character of the first settlers was that of plain, honest farmers. Most of them, in the common language of the world, were poor. Some of them had scarcely more than their clothes, their axe and a little provision. They were

* This is the old house on the place where Samuel Wheeler Weston now lives.

† The house in which Stephen Foster now resides.

Digitized by Google

also men of little education, and their children suffered greatly for want of schooling.

Would our children and youth know how great their privileges are, and how to prize them, let them, in imagination, go back fifty or sixty years, and place themselves for a little time beside those of their age at that period. The children were then so widely scattered, that for a time it was impracticable to form them into schools. The standard of education also was low. A man who could read plain reading, and cypher to the Rule of Three, was considered qualified to teach a common school. And even in the early days of *your* fathers, my young friends, when they went to school they had not a well constructed and comfortable school house. Most commonly they had a room in some private house, miserably fitted up with benches to sit on, and a kind of tottering table on which to write, and not unfrequently scarcely light enough to see to read. Add to all this, they had very few books in schools or in families. In many places scholars seldom if ever heard in school of English Grammar, Geography, Natural Philosophy, Mathematics, &c., which are studies now brought within the reach of almost every youth. If therefore the present generation do not exceed the preceding in useful learning, great blame must be attached to them.

Our forefathers, and mothers too, who subdued the wilderness before them, were a hardy and an industrious race. The prime object of their clothing was comfort, and their food was very uniform and plain. Tea was not known among them in this early period. In summer, milk and bread was the food, especially of children, morning and evening; and in the winter, as a general thing, they had a good boiled dish for dinner, which laid the foundation for a supper, and for a breakfast next morning for the family. And I presume those early inhabitants of the town never heard of such a disease as dyspepsia. They were not distinguishingly subject to fevers; and cases of consumption were very rare; and where they did occur, they were slow in their progress—not unfre-

Digitized by Google

quently did it take years to do the work, which consumption now sometimes performs in a few weeks. Also, when our hardy ancestors were going through the toil of subduing the wilderness, they did not have ardent spirits to cool them in the heat of labor, when toiling in the sun, or to warm them when buffeting the storms, or enduring the cold of winter.

Another trait in the character of the early settlers of No. 1, is to be distinctly noticed, or we shall injure them. Most of them were brought up where the holy Sabbath was regarded, and they were accustomed to hear the gospel preached. They did not, when removed far from the sanctuary, and from the ordinances of the gospel, feel as if this were a desired freedom. They not only made early efforts, even before they were an incorporate body, to have occasional preaching, but they were desirous of having a minister settled among them; and few and feeble as they were, they did not shrink from the effort on account of the expense. As early as 1753, the proprietors and inhabitants voted to allow sixty pounds (Old Tenor undoubtedly,) to pay for preaching, and from this time it appears they had preaching more or less every year.

Previous to this, they had voted to build a meeting house, agreed upon the dimensions, appointed a committee, and directed them "to enclose the house, lay the under floor, and build a convenient place for the minister to stand in to preach." This was an arduous undertaking considering their number, and especially that they had no mill, in which they could prepare materials for building from their own forests. But it was done. And having a house for worship, they were not satisfied with preaching part of the time. They voted to settle a minister as early as 1762, i. e., in thirteen years after the grant of the township. At the same time they gave a call to Mr. Ebenezer Champney, (the late Judge Champney, of New Ipswich,) to settle with them; and offered him as settlement "700 £ silver, O. T. £400 salary yearly, and a right of land." This was a generous offer considering their

Digitized by Google

number and circumstances. I have named these sums more particularly for the benefit, or perhaps the amusement, of the young people, who may wish for some information respecting this Old Tenor, and its valuation.

The currency of our ancestors in New England was reckoned in pounds, shillings and pence, and was called Old Tenor, in distinction from another valuation of the same denominations of money, called Lawful money, or sometimes New Tenor. Now although the same terms were used in both, their meaning, or valuation was widely different. The denomination in Old Tenor was just seven and a half times less in value, than the same in Lawful money. Hence to reduce Lawful money into Old Tenor is to multiply it by 7½, and to reduce Old Tenor into Lawful money, divide by the same. Hence we see that the offer made to Mr. Champney was, in the present currency of the day, $311 12 cents settlement, and $177 78 cents salary.* Mr. Champney did not accept the call; nevertheless the people were not discouraged. In 1766, they gave a call to one James Parker, with an offer of £400 O. T., until there were eighty families, and then £450 until one hundred families, from which time the salary should be established at £500. This call was not accepted; and it does not appear that any other like attempt was made, until an act of incorporation was obtained.

These hardy pioneers not only suffered many privations, but endured many severe hardships. Not the least of these was the labor of making roads, and for years the badness of traveling, where something was done to make a road. And until they could raise some grain on their new farms, all their bread stuffs, and most of their other provisions must be brought from the older settlements. The instance of hardship, which I am about to name, may be an extreme case, but it may help our young friends to form some idea of the sufferings incident to new settlers, especially to those, who are

* Thus £700-:-7½=£93, 6, 8 Lawful=$311 11-|- settlement. Again, £400 O. T.-:-by 7½= £53 6s. 8d. Lawful=to $177 78-|-cents.

Digitized by Google

poor and destitute. Deacon Hall, who has been named, I have been informed, after having toiled all day on his farm, has in the night traveled on foot to Pepperell, and returned bringing a bag of meal on his shoulder for his hungry children; and then labored the next day as usual.

Not the least of the sufferings, and the cause of continued suffering, arose from their ignorance of clearing wood land, by felling the trees and then burning the ground over. I have been told by some of them that for several years, the only method of clearing the forest was to chop the wood, draw it together, pile it, burn the heaps, and then break up the ground with the plough, or breaking-up hoe, before planting or sowing. This accounts in some measure for the slow progress they at first made in clearing.

Again, the people suffered very much for years from want of mills. It was a primary object with the grantees and first settlers to have mills erected; and, as encouragement, mill seats were looked out, and land granted and contracts made, but I can find no evidence, of a mill of any description in the town before the year 1766 or 7. In the year 1767, I find an article in a warrant for a meeting of the proprietors, to see if they will accept the road by Thomas Barrett's mill, and build a bridge across Souhegan river, near said mill. It appears that Benjamin Bellows, Esq., contracted to build mills at this place, but did not fulfil his contract. And also that Thomas Barrett and Charles Barrett built mills in this place, and sold them to Amos Dakin, of Lincoln, Mass., who removed with his family into this town in the year 1768. At that time, seventy-eight years since, there was no opening in the dense forest, where this village now stands, except for the mill, and a spot cleared for a house. In 1767, Elias Elliot's mill was accepted by the proprietors. I have also evidence that not far from the same time, a mill was erected in the east part of the town, on the Ward place so called, where Mr. Bennet now lives.

Now think how much the people must have suffered who

Digitized by Google

lived ten or fifteen years, where, if they raised any grain they must carry it to Townsend or Pepperell, and sometimes even to Groton, to have it made into meal; and although they had timber in abundance, they could not have a board, but it must come from another town. Yet they submitted to these inconveniences and hardships with cheerfulness, and persevered in labor, till they had prepared for the comfort of their children.

Not only did the men display courage, and resolution, and public spirit, but I have been told by the women themselves, that they have traveled, some two, and some three miles through the woods, with nothing to direct their way but marked trees, to carry dinner to their husbands, when working at the meeting house. I believe that some of my hearers would think such a case a great hardship, if the case was theirs.

But, however strong female fortitude may be in duty, where none are exposed to danger but themselves, how must the tender mother suffer, if her young children are absent a little longer than was expected, or if out of sight when the light of day departs—where the wolves and other wild animals are so numerous, that their noise in the night would break those of their rest, who had toiled all day, and needed the refreshment of sleep?

Many of the early settlers reared up and left large families, and their descendants are numerous in the town; but some of the families are almost extinct. Our fathers, where are they? Many of them lived to be old. But they are gone.*

As to natural curiosities, this town does not abound in them. There are no very remarkable caverns, or precipices, or streams; and we all know that the face of the ground is uneven, and the soil is stony. There is, however, in the deep

* A case I will here name as very uncommon and remarkable. Deacon Hall, of whom I have spoken, built him a house in the early period of his settlement, and dwelt in it, with his family (which was not small) to his old age—till it was no longer habitable, and never did an instance of death occur in that house. Nevertheless, the builder, and I believe all that were brought up in that house, have gone the way of the earth.

Digitized by Google

hollow, east of the old meeting house, (where by some convulsion of nature the rocks are thrown together in wild confusion,) a small cave, which those who have visited, have thought worthy of a visit. The streams of water are small, yet they afford some valuable mill sites, on which are now eight saw-mills in operation part of the year, and six run of stone for grinding grain.

In this place, I will name another fact, which may be considered belonging to the history of the town. The hills were favorite hunting grounds, and long before a grant of the town was obtained, and for years after it began to be settled, the hunters frequently kindled fires in the woods for the benefit of their hunting. And if the hunters did not fire the woods, some men from lower towns did, that young sprouts might come up for young cattle to feed upon. By these means, some parts of the town, especially Pole Hill, so called, ranging south from the stone school house, was greatly injured, while yielding grain to those who did not own the soil. And some families in Groton used to make hay in the meadow, near the centre, called Nose-meadow, where they had a camp, and in the latter part of winter send up young cattle, and a black man named Boad, to feed and tend them, until they could get their living in the woods.* Here Boad used to spend months alone, year after year, like Robinson Crusoe, "sole monarch of all he surveyed."

The period to which we have now arrived, was to this town like that of youth, just blooming into manhood. They began to think, and talk of being incorporated. They had a desire to be like other towns; and yet had fears whether equal to take such a stand. This kind of trembling state of mind appears from their votes at meetings, where the subject was agitated. At a meeting called partly for this purpose, April, 1766, it was finally voted, not to be incorporated at present. Thus it rested until January, 1768, and the meeting was

* Boad's camp was but a few rods from the spot, on which Joel Ames' house now stands.—This Boad was a slave.

Digitized by Google

adjourned four weeks for consideration. At the adjournment it was voted to be incorporated, "and that Lt. O. Parker be appointed to attend to the business, and get it accomplished as soon as may be."

The next point to be settled, was the name by which the town should be called. And at a meeting held June, 1768, it was voted that the town be called Sharon. It does not appear from any records I have seen, or from any tradition which has reached me, why the name of Sharon was dropped, and the name Mason adopted. There was, however, a report current among the old people, that "a bell was sent from England for this town, as a present from the heirs of Mr. Mason," which, if fact, will account for the name. It is also reported, that by the knavery of the agent of Mr. Mason in Boston, the bell was lost to the town—that he sold the bell, and absconded with this and other dishonest gains. And the bell on the Old South in Boston, is said to be that bell. The next meeting was warned in the name of the inhabitants of Mason; and the place was no longer known as Number 1. But although they had assumed a rank among the towns in the Province, they felt themselves, as a society, weak and feeble. When the first tax was assessed under the corporation, there were but seventy-six rateable polls, and probably not more than fifty-six voters; for young men between eighteen and twenty-one years of age were rateable, and their rates charged to fathers or masters. And for a number of years, Brookline, then Raby, was classed with Mason to send a representative to the General Court; and the meetings for choice were held alternately at Brookline and Mason.

It will be necessary now to take some notice of the church, in connection with the history of the town. At that time a town was an incorporate *religious*, as well as civil society. And all the inhabitants of a town belonged to that society, except they united with, or formed another religious society, according to law. The meeting house erected by the original proprietors, was by them given to the town, and remained

Digitized by Google

the only house for their religious assemblies, and other public meetings, until the year 1790. It was an uncomfortable place. In that house did your fathers worship; and uncomfortable as it was, seldom did a Sabbath pass, even in the cold of winter, in which there was no meeting, after they had a stated ministry. A good number of the early settlers were members of the Congregational church, in the towns from which they removed, but no church was formed in Mason, until the year 1772, at which time Mr. Jonathan Searle was ordained their pastor. The church then consisted of twenty-one members, twelve brethren and nine sisters, all of whom are gone to their long home. When the church was gathered, it was stated to be a Calvinistic church, and that their articles of faith agree substantially with the principles of religion, contained in the Shorter Catechism of the Assembly of Divines.

Shortly after the settlement of Mr. Searle, unhappy difficulties arose between the pastor and the flock, which eventuated in his dismission, in nine years and three months after his ordination. From that time Mr. Searle ceased to preach, but continued in the town, and officiated as a civil magistrate, to an advanced age. During his ministry, only fourteen were admitted to the church by profession, and nine by letter, and eleven owned the covenant, as it was called, according to the practice of many churches in New England, in those days. The last admitted by profession in Mr. Searle's ministy, was in April, 1777, and but one more, and that by letter, until 1790. Here was a long death-like sleep! but one added to the church in thirteen years. The sleep seems to have been profound—death-like indeed, until the year 1785, when a great revival of religion, and of the work of God, commenced in New Ipswich, under the ministry of the venerable Farrar—a name venerated indeed by all who knew him. The gracious work extended into other towns; and this part of the vineyard was remembered in mercy. Some few christians were awakened, and brought to apply themselves to

Digitized by Google

neglected duties; and the people in Mason, especially the young, flocked to the solemn meetings in New Ipswich, and soon some were reproved of sin, became anxious for their souls, and after a time, rejoiced in hope of pardoning mercy. Such, however, was the state of the church in Mason, broken, and dispirited, that the young candidates for the church were led to seek admission to the church in New Ipswich, to which they had become peculiarly attached by that acquaintance, which their situation and intercourse had brought about; and by that mutual love which new-born souls, who have mourned, and wept, and prayed and rejoiced together, must feel. Their request was granted, on condition that they remove their relation whenever the church in Mason should become in a settled state. In the year 1790, the resident members of other churches removed their relation, and the church was increased to thirty-six in number, and in the same year, Nov. 3d, was the present pastor ordained, and constituted pastor of this church. In this long period of fifty-six years, there have been precious seasons of revival. I will mention some of those seasons. In 1802, the church was increased by the addition of forty-four members—in 1812, added twenty-five—in 1826 and 7, added eighty-six—in 1834 and '35, added thirty-eight; and in 1841, added eighty-three. The whole number of members, received by profession and letter, is rising four hundred and fifty.

A Baptist church was embodied in this town, Oct. 28, 1786, then consisting of seven members, three males and four females. Additions were made by letter and profession to this church in this and neighboring towns. About this time, Mr. Wm. Elliot, an inhabitant of the town, commenced preaching the gospel, and labored much in this and other towns, as an evangelist, until in August, 1788, the church of which he was a member, gave him a call to become their pastor, which call he accepted, and was ordained by an ecclesiastical council, on the 3d Wednesday in November, 1788. For a time, the care of almost all the Baptist churches in the

Digitized by Google

vicinity, came upon him. He raised up a numerous family, and had two sons settled in the ministry. He lived to a good old age, his last sickness was very distressing, which he endured with patience, and died in the triumphs of faith, June 14, 1830, aged 81 years. The church of which he was pastor, is now merged in the Baptist church in Mason village.

In the month of May, in the year 1833, another church and society was gathered and embodied in this town, consisting at the time, of twenty-three members. This society assume only the name of *Christian*.

Since the year 1790, there has been no inconsiderable increase of inhabitants, and no little improvement in buildings, and other accommodations. The exact number of voters in 1790, is not ascertained; but in 1768, we may calculate about fifty-six, and in March, 1845, our check list told three hundred and six legal voters. In the year 1790, when almost the whole town undertook to build a meeting house, it was with many discouragements and fears. They felt poor and weak-handed for such an undertaking. The house was built and remains the meeting house of the town. And now, besides this, we have three meeting houses, and three religious societies, and probably each society equally able to build their house, as was the first.

I can reckon up but one hundred and ten dwelling houses, of every description, standing in the town in 1790. And at that time, on all the ground which contains this flourishing village, there were standing the first mill built here, one dwelling house, built at two times, for the accommodation of two families, and one barn.* Now we can count fifty-two dwelling houses, three stores, one meeting house, three factory buildings—one in full operation, carrying two thousand four hundred and sixty-four spindles, in this village.

Compare the present state of the Columbian Factory, with the one first built here, and it will give a fair view of the advance of our country in manufactures, arts and commerec.

* The widow Polly Hill now occupies the remaining part of the house.

Digitized by Google

The first Cotton Factory in Mason, commenced operation in the year 1813, with one hundred spindles, in four small frames, and was kept running night and day. At that time, the price of cotton was from twenty-five to thirty cents per pound, and the price of yarn, No. 16, was one dollar per pound. In 1814 cotton was forty cents, and yarn one dollar and sixteen cents per pound. At that time all the cotton was picked by hand, in private families, and the cloth was wove in house looms; and the price of shirting, was from thirty to forty cents per yard. For constant market the cloth must be sent in wagons to Albany. And at that time there was no market here for farm produce.

At the time referred to, 1790, there were but four, and those very poor, school houses in the town; now there are ten; some of them may be called good. And not only is the number of dwelling houses increased, but there is an advance in elegance and convenience. At that time many of the dwellings were miserably poor; and but one in all the town, Mr. Parker's, had any paint on the outside, and that scarcely perceptible by reason of age. And I can think of only three rooms in all the town, then adorned with paper hangings.

Since those ancient days there have been great changes in customs and fashions, and manner of living; and many conveniences have been introduced; but whether on the whole for the better, remains to be proved. At that period there was not a chaise, or other wheel carriage for pleasure, in all the town, (a light one horse wagon, for pleasure or business is a modern invention,) neither was there one single sleigh. To ride on horseback was fashionable for men and women; and could they have a single horse, this was traveling in style. It was not uncommon for a man and woman to ride on the same horse to meeting or a short journey, and carry one or two children. Probably if I should tell some of my young friends, that their mothers and grandmothers rode on a *pillion* behind their husbands, they would have no idea of that easy and commodious seat, a pillion. But, I have frequently seen

Digitized by Google

a man and his wife ride together on a horse to meeting, on the sabbath, after their united ages amounted to one hundred and sixty-nine years. It was also not uncommon for families to ride to meeting, or to make social visits, in the winter, on sleds drawn by oxen, and they would chat and smile as cheerfully, as they now do in a stage and four or six.

And will you, my young friends, believe that your mothers and grandmothers, and those who moved in the first grade of society, were not ashamed to be seen in the religious assembly, or in any company on other occasions, dressed in their plain, decent, warm, home-made clothing, or at the most, in the summer, in a chintz gown, and a white linen apron? Such was indeed the fact. And you may judge, whether they were not more *comfortable* than they would have been in some modern dresses—whether the change to costly elegance and finery has been a real advance in the enjoyment of life.

In the early period of the settlement, it was often impracticable to keep the roads open in the winter, so as to pass with a team or a horse from house to house, to meeting or to mill. The people were not however confined at home, through a long and dreary winter. Every family, and almost every man was provided with a pair of snow shoes, otherwise called *rackets*. (It would doubtless be as difficult at this day to give our young men a correct idea of rackets, as to give our young ladies a correct idea of a *pillion*.) With these snow shoes they were enabled to walk on the snow, and after passing a few times would have a good foot path from house to house. And not unfrequently were they necessitated to get up their wood, and carry their grain to mill, on hand sleds drawn on these racket paths. And although horses could not travel, you may not think the young ladies or their mothers were confined at home, and must lose all the pleasures of social visits, while the snow lay deep on the ground. They too would put on the snow shoes, and travel off; and although enduring a little more fatigue, they enjoyed their visits, it is

Digitized by Google

presumed, as well as do ladies at the present day, when wafted over the snow with the music of bells.

Our ancestors were a hardy race, but they were sometimes visited with sickness, and death entered their dwellings. For a long time they must have obtained all their medical aid from other towns; for there never was a resident Physician in the town, until about 1790, when Dr. Joseph Gray and Dr. William Barber established themselves permanently here. Dr. Barber is yet living. Dr. Willis Johnson commenced medical practice here in the year 1814.

The inhabitants were not so exactly on the peace establishment as to have no litigation; but they were necessitated to seek legal advice and services from gentlemen of the bar in other towns. For there never was a lawyer became an inhabitant of this town, until the late Samuel Whiting, Esq., opened an office, and commenced residence about the year 1825. At the time of my earliest acquaintance with the town, there were, and there had never been, but two justices of the peace in the place, Jonathan Searle and Benjamin Mann; they remained the only magistrates in the town several years after this. Esquire Mann held his office until he removed from the town, and Esquire Searle held his until his death. Who was the first Representative of the town in the General Court, as it was then called, is not easily ascertained. But it appears that as early as the year 1775, Amos Dakin was chosen by the joint ballot of Raby and Mason, to represent them in a Convention at Exeter in December; and likewise commissioned to act in the Assembly, if requisite. This must have been the time when Mr. Dakin traveled from Mason to Exeter on snow shoes, because not practicable in any other way. He may be considered the first Representative. The first Grand Juror chosen was Thomas Tarbell, the first petit Juror drawn was Zachariah Davis—the year 1771.

The early inhabitants of the town of Mason were true sons of liberty. When the difficulties between the mother country and the Colonies, arose to such a pitch as to take away the

Digitized by Google

hope of accommodation, they were ready to act with decision. I have never heard of but one inhabitant of Mason, at that time, who was unfriendly to the cause of the Colonies. Captain Samuel Tarbell was then considered a *tory*, as those were called, who were disposed to espouse and maintain the cause of the King and Parliament in all their oppressive acts against the Colonies. He, after the war commenced, fled and took refuge within the British lines. When it was apparent that the Colonies must submit unconditionally, or, weak and feeble as they were, must defend themselves against the mighty power of Great Britain, these sons of the forest were by no means behind any of their brethren, in making preparation for defence, and in readiness to step forward and exert their strength, when called to action. In the year 1774, meetings of the town were frequent; and it appears that there was great unanimity in their resolves, which were all of the defensive character. In this year they voted to purchase a town stock of ammunition, and a quantity of arms. At the same time, they entered into solemn covenant to suspend all commercial intercourse with Great Britain, until her acts of Parliament leveled at the rights of the Colonies should be repealed, and the Port of Boston, which was then shut, should be opened. This covenant was substantially the same, as was entered into in the Colonies generally; but the spirit of these sons of liberty was seen in the closing up of the solemn covenant, the last clause of which was in substance, that "all who refused or neglected to come into this or a like agreement, ought to be, and should by them be considered and esteemed enemies to their country." Such a covenant was not only voted in town meeting to be accepted, but a committee was appointed to see that the covenant be signed by the inhabitants, and to take and report the names of all who refused to sign. This committee consisted of the following persons: Amos Dakin, Samuel Brown, Joshua Davis, Nathan Hall and James Wethee. Also, in 1775, a committee of *inspection* was appointed, to see that the resolves of the Con-

Digitized by Google

tinental Congress be duly observed. And to prepare for comfortable subsistence as well as for defence, in town meeting it was voted, in view of the increasing difficulty which might be expected, of procuring such a necessary article as salt, "that thirty hogsheads be purchased, while it could be had, for the use of the town."

We have evidence also, that the fathers of the present generation were not only brave and prudent in *Resolves*, but also in *action*.

When tidings arrived in Mason, that the *Regulars*, i. e. the British troops, had gone out from Boston, and proceeded as far as Concord, and that blood was actually shed in Lexington and Concord, the men dropped their tools, and with all possible speed, hastened to the spot, where blood had flowed. And I have been informed that the training soldiers, on this occasion, ready to avenge the blood of their slaughtered countrymen, marched under officers, who held their commission from the King, whose troops they were willing to engage, without thinking of any impropriety. New Hampshire troops were distinguished in the war. And as far as can be judged at this time from town records and tradition, Mason bore its full proportion, with other towns, in sufferings and effective labor.

I wish I could give you the names of all the Mason men, who were with the gallant Stark in the battle of Bennington. Many of the young men of the town spent their best days in the army. Some of the elderly men were found in the tented field; but many of the soldiers entered the service of their country in their very boyhood, not by compulsion, but by voluntary enlistment, and continued in the service, until the independence of the country was acknowledged, and peace spread her blessings over the land. A few, and but a few of them all, survive to the present day.

The names of most of the early settlers in the town, are handed down in their posterity. A few families have lost their name, yet the greater part of the present inhabitants,

Digitized by Google

are descendants of those who cleared the forests for them. Who will be ashamed of such ancestors? We pretend not that they were faultless; but let their descendants emulate their virtues, and avoid their errors and faults, as far as they are known, and Mason will be a happy spot in our favored land.

Your attention is now called to another subject, which makes a part of the history of the town, yet of a different character from that which we have been contemplating.

Health is said to be the greatest of temporal blessings. Of this we have been favored with, at least, a common share with other towns around; and we can tell of many instances of longevity. In the course of the forty last years, there have died in this town fifty-seven between eighty and ninety years old, fourteen between ninety and one hundred. One man, Jonathan Foster, exceeded one hundred years, and another, Oliver Eliott, one hundred and two and one-half. It may be well to note in a passing remark, that these two old men were very temperate in the use of intoxicating drinks, for the age in which they lived, and their common food was of the plainest kinds.

But notwithstanding the acknowledged healthiness of the place, and many instances of longevity, we have had seasons of calamity, in which mortal sickness has prevailed. We have had two seasons in which *angina maligna,* or throat distemper, or canker rash, so called, has spread terror and dismay over the place, and carried many of the young children and blooming youth, to an early grave. In the year 1810, this dreadful distemper made its appearance, in the last of March, or beginning of April, and continued to spread dismay, until the month of August. In this short period many families felt the scourge, and death cut off twelve children, all but two, under the age of five years. Again, in the years 1818 and 1819, the same dreadful disease was epidemic in the town, and many of the children and youth fell before this destroyer. These years were the years of the greatest mor-

Digitized by Google

tality ever known in the town; in one 34, in the other 31 deaths, 65 in two years. In the reign of this malignant disease, but one aged person fell before the shaft of death, while 40 were cut down under the age of eighteen. With respect to the visitation of this malignant distemper at this time, it is to be remarked, it began in the South East part of the town, in the family of Darius Hudson, in a small house standing on an highly elevated spot, not near any other building; this was about the middle of September, 1818; and it continued to rage until the beginning of August, 1819. It is noted, it began in the South East part of the town. By this, you will understand, that we have no knowledge that the sickness existed at that time, in any neighboring town, and certainly it was not in any other house at this time. Its first appearance was in its most malignant form. In the short space of eight days, three out of seven children died in the first visited family. The disease did not spread in the nearest families. This did not appear to be a radiating point, from which contagion should issue forth in all directions. Instead of that, its next appearance was at a good distance, at least a mile to the North East, where there had been no communication between the families. And the third case was in the extreme South part of the town. And thus it extended from East to West, from North to South, to every part of the town. Neither was it always the case, that all the children of the same family, or who lived in the same house, where the sickness was, had it. And not only, as in the first instance, but in other instances, those had the disease, who had not been exposed to catch it, as they say, by coming in contact with the diseased, or entering infected places.

Here I will name one extraordinary case, and leave it without comment.

There was a little girl in a family in the South side of the town, somewhat remote from neighbors, who was the only child in the house. She was an adopted daughter; and the foster mother had such forebodings of death, should the

Digitized by Google

disease attack her child, and such apprehensions of danger from exposure, that from the first knowledge she had of the existence of the disease in the town, she restricted her child to the house, and suffered no child from abroad to enter her doors. This secluded child fell sick of this frightful disease, and died.

In conclusion of this point of interesting history, I state that in the space of the last forty-six years, there have been removed from this town—from their houses, and fields, and possessions, to the narrow home appointed for all the living, a number, little, if any short of eight hundred and thirty. What a congregation this would make! more than half the number of the present inhabitants. Looking at the past, what changes may be expected in the future? It is believed that there are but two living, on earth, who were members of the Congregational church, in this town, in the year 1790, (LydiaWilson and PollyDunster,) and but two who were at that time at the head of a family, (widow Withington and James Wethee.) O how often have we all been admonished to prepare for death, and for that judgment which is after death. Death doth not select his victims among the aged, but often levels his arrow at the fairest blooming youth. Let such another period, as we are contemplating, pass away, and few, if any, of the present active inhabitants of this town, will be on earth.

Be not offended, then, with one who has passed the greater part of his short life with you, and whose glass of life is just run out, who would affectionately entreat you to consider your latter end—would direct your attention to the end of time, and to your present preparation to die. O remember, Christ in you is the hope of glory, and the only hope that will not fail. Look away to the Lamb of God, as the only savior of sinners—go to him as sinners—go without delay. Or if you have already made Christ all your salvation, let him have your heart—let him have your life, and then when you shall have done with all things here below, you will not

Digitized by Google

only rest from all your labors in the peaceful grave, but you will live in the full enjoyment of the love and favor of Christ, forever and ever. Your friend prays that your future history, may be pleasantly instructive to all who come after you; and may your last end be peace.

Digitized by Google

LIST OF PUBLISHED DISCOURSES.

The following list includes, it is believed, all the published discourses of Mr. Hill.

1. A sermon delivered at Mason, April 11, 1803, at the funeral of Miss Persis Lawrence, daughter of Mr. Stephen Lawrence, aged 23 years. Text Eccl. 8 : 8. Printed at Amherst, by Joseph Cushing.

2. A sermon delivered at Mason, March 22, 1805, at the funeral of Miss Hannah Lawrence, daughter of Stephen Lawrence, Esq. Aged 26 years. Text, Psalm 90 : 12. Printed at Amherst, by Joseph Cushing.

3. A sermon delivered at Mason, July 18, 1805, at the funeral of Mr. Luther Lawrence, son of Stephen Lawrence, Esq., aged twenty years. Text 1 Cor. 15 : 21. Printed at Amherst, by Joseph Cushing.

4. A sermon delivered at New Ipswich, June 3d, 1811, at the funeral of Miss Ruthy Bachelder. Text, Psalm 88 : 7, 8, 18.

5. A sermon delivered at New Ipswich, August 6th, 1811, at the funeral of William Kimball Bachelder. Text, Eccl. 9 : 12; with an appendix, containing a sketch of the life of Miss Bachelder, and extracts from her letters and papers. Printed at Boston, by Munroe and Francis. Sermons and appendix, pp. 48.

6. A sermon delivered at New Ipswich, September 22, 1815, at the funeral of Miss Clarissa Davis. Text, Eccl. 9 : 4; with an appendix, containing extracts from her diary and letters, by the Rev. Richard Hall. Printed at Boston, by Samuel T. Armstrong.

Digitized by Google

7. A sermon delivered at Mason, May 16th, 1817, at the funeral of Mrs. Mary Blodgett, wife of John Blodgett, Esq. who was instantly killed by being thrown from a wagon. Text, Ezekiel 24 : 18. Printed at Amherst, by Richard Boylston.

8. A sermon delivered at Brookline, November 27th, 1817, at the interment of the remains of the Rev. Lemuel Wadsworth, pastor of the Congregational church in that place. Text, 2 Cor. 5 : 1. Printed at Amherst, by Richard Boylston.

9. A sermon delivered at Mason, August 28th, 1826, at the funeral of Joseph Addison Robbins, son of Joseph B. Robbins and Hannah his wife. Text, Jer. 9 : 21. Printed at New Ipswich, by Salmon Wilder.

10. A funeral sermon delivered at Mason, on Lord's Day, December 10th, 1826, occasioned by the death of Capt. Hiram Smith, who deceased December 6th, 1826, aged twenty-five years. Text, Job 21 : 23—26. Printed at Amherst, at the Cabinet press.

11. A sermon delivered at Mason, at the house of James Wood, Esq., November 4th, 1835, being on the completing of his eightieth year. Text, Psalm 90 : 9—12. New Ipswich, printed at the News Gatherers's office.

12. A sermon preached at Ashby, at the house of Mr. Jacob Cowdry, on the birth day of Mrs. Tabitha Pearson, who then completed the one hundredth year of her age. Text, 2 Sam. 19 : 34, 35, 37. Amherst, printed by Richard Boylston.

13. The substance of two lectures on the History of Mason, delivered before the Lyceum in Mason village, February, 1846. Printed at Fitchburg, by W. J. Merriam.

These, with some contributions to the Medical and Agricultural Register, a periodical conducted by Dr. Daniel Adams, and some occasional communications to the Farmer's Cabinet, a newspaper published at Amherst, N. H., comprise all his printed works, so far as is known at this time.

Digitized by Google

In a family monument of native granite, erected in the old grave yard, is inserted a marble tablet, with an inscription, of which the following is a copy:

HIS CHURCH AND PEOPLE DEVOTE THIS TABLET TO THE MEMORY OF THE

REV. EBENEZER HILL.

BORN IN CAMBRIDGE, JAN. 31, 1766.

GRADUATED AT HARVARD COLLEGE, 1786.

ORDAINED PASTOR OF THE CHURCH, AND MINISTER OF THE TOWN OF MASON, NOVEMBER 3, 1790.

DIED MAY 20, 1854, IN THE 89th YEAR OF HIS AGE, AND THE 64th OF HIS MINISTRY.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT, HE DEVOTED HIS TIME AND STRENGTH TO THE WORK OF HIS LORD AND MASTER; READY AT ALL TIMES TO DIRECT THE ENQUIRING, TO CHEER THE DOUBTING, TO WARN THE SINFUL, TO VISIT THE SICK AND AFFLICTED, AND OFFER TO THEM THE COMFORT AND SUPPORT OF RELIGION; AFTER A LONG LIFE OF USEFULNESS, HE DEPARTED IN PEACE, HUMBLY TRUSTING TO RECEIVE THE WELCOME MESSAGE, WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT, ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

DUE MAY 27 1915

Digitized by Google

Memoir of the Rev. Ebenezer Hill,
Widener Library 002861934
3 2044 086 343 407